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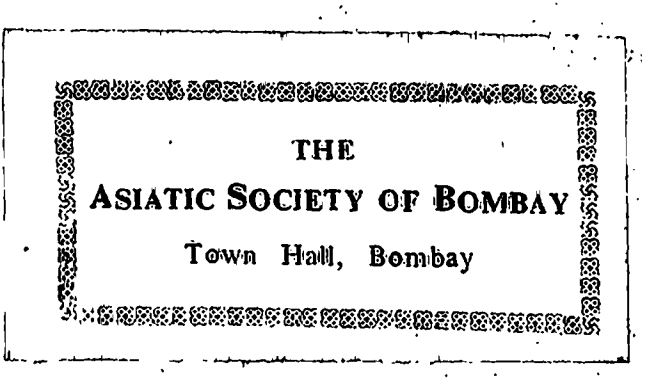


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# The Whole Scriptures.

BY

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VOL. IV.

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## CCCXXXI.

CHARACTERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

Ps. i. 1—4. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful: but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so.*

THE Psalms were chiefly, though not exclusively, written by David: some were written, one at least, many hundred years before him; and several many hundred years after him. It is supposed that Ezra reduced them to the order in which they stand. We are sure that, in the Apostle's days, the Second Psalm occupied the same place that it does now; because it is quoted by him as "the Second Psalm." They are quoted continually in the New Testament as inspired of God: and so fully do they speak of Christ, that an account of his life and death, his work and offices, might be compiled from them almost as clearly as from the Gospels themselves. The psalm before us seems properly placed, as a kind of preface to the whole; inasmuch as it contains a summary description of the righteous and the wicked, both in their character and end. We will consider,

I. The description of the godly—

We are not to expect in a composition of this kind a full

a full and accurate delineation of men's characters, such as we might look for in a set discourse: nevertheless, in the brief notices here given us, we have what is abundantly sufficient to distinguish the saints from all other people upon the face of the earth. They are here described,

1. In plain terms—

[Two things we are told concerning them, namely, *What company they affect*, and, *What employment they delight in.* They have no pleasure in the society of ungodly men. They are aware that "evil communications will corrupt good manners;" and that the surest way to avoid infection, is, to come as little as possible in contact with those who are diseased. They see how fatal, and yet how common, is the progress of sin; that to *walk*, however occasionally, in the *counsel* of the *ungodly* (who are destitute of any religious principle), is a prelude to *standing* in the *way* of *sinners* (gross, open sinners), and, at last, to *sitting* in the *seat* of the *scornful*, who despise and deride all true piety. Hence, fearing lest, by unnecessarily associating with the wicked, they should be drawn to adopt their principles, and to imitate their conduct, they either withdraw from them altogether, or contract their intercourse with them, as much as will consist with a due discharge of their social and relative duties.

Privacy, and reading of the holy Scriptures, are more congenial with their feelings, than the noise and vanity of the world. In the blessed word of God they see all the wonders of redeeming love: in that, they find the charter, by which they are entitled to an everlasting inheritance. There they behold thousands of exceeding great and precious promises, which are as marrow and fatness to their souls: there also they see marked out to them the way in which to please, and honour, and glorify their God: and, by meditating on these various precepts and promises, they find their souls cast, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel, and gradually transformed into the image of their God. Hence they delight to ruminate on the word of God; yea, "day and night" they make it their meditation and their joy: like Job, they "esteem it more than their necessary food."]

2. By a beautiful comparison—

[In consequence of thus "eschewing evil and cleaving unto that which is good," they become like a tree planted by the canals in Eastern countries, which flourishes with incessant verdure and fruitfulness; whilst all that are less favourably situated, are parched and withered by drought. The godly are "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting:" their roots are constantly watered by that "river which makes glad the city of God:" and by the fertilizing influences of the Spirit of God they

they bring forth in rich abundance "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." A diversity of seasons they doubtless experience: but never is their profession tarnished by open visible decays, or by a want of such fruits as the peculiar season calls for. On the contrary, the winds and storms, and heats and cold, all tend to further their stability and fruitfulness; insomuch that "whatsoever they do," or whatsoever is done to them, "they prosper[a]." See them in the diversified seasons of prosperity and adversity, they shew by their conduct "whose they are," even Christ's, "of whose fulness they continually receive," and "of whom all their fruit is found."]

In perfect contrast with this is,

II. The description of the ungodly—

Exceedingly pointed is that expression, "THE UNGODLY ARE NOT SO." No indeed: they "are not so,"

1. In their character—

[The ungodly, instead of shunning the company of those who fear not God, prefer it; and would far rather associate with an avowed infidel, or a notorious libertine, than with one who was distinguished for the most exalted piety. They do not all proceed to the same extent of open profaneness; but all without exception "love darkness rather than light;" yea, "they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved."

And as they prefer the society of them that know not God, so they prefer any other book, whether of science or amusement, before the Sacred Volume. They may study the holy Scriptures indeed with a view to head-knowledge; but not with any desire to imbibe the spirit of them in their hearts, or to have their lives conformed to them. In this there is an extremely broad line of distinction between the two characters: to the godly the Scriptures are "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb;" but to the ungodly they are insipid, and are either not perused at all, or studied only for the purpose of exercising a critical acumen. There is nothing in the Sacred Volume that is suited to their taste: the wonders of Redemption do not affect their minds; nor are the precepts of the Gospel palatable to their souls.

Would we but candidly examine ourselves by these two marks, we should soon discover to which of these parties we belong.]

2. In their condition[aa]—

[To such a tree as has been been before described, the ungodly

[a] Rom. viii. 28.

[aa] Nor in the "*blessedness*" of the saints have they any part or lot.

ungodly bear no resemblance: their root is fixed in the world: their fruit is no other than "grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrah." But there is an appropriate comparison for them also; "they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." Truly, they are as light and worthless as chaff. No solid principle of piety is found in them; nor is there any thing in their character which God approves. To a superficial observer they may appear like wheat: but the fan or sieve will soon discover how empty and unsubstantial they are: or, if they continue mixed with the wheat in this world, the separation will speedily and infallibly take place in the world to come. The Judge of quick and dead will come, even He, of whom it is said, "His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire[b]." Amongst the wheat, not an atom of chaff will then be found; nor amongst the chaff, one grain of wheat[c]. This, divested of metaphor, is plainly declared in the psalm before us; "The ungodly shall stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous[d]." Ah! what an immense difference is here in the conditions of the two parties! the one approved of their God, and made partakers of everlasting felicity; the other, abhorred of him, and plunged into everlasting perdition[e]!]

ADDRESS,

1. To young people—

[To you it appears but a small matter whom you choose for your associates. But, if you consider how much we are influenced by the sentiments and examples of others, and what awful consequences will follow from the conduct we pursue, we shall see the necessity of selecting those only for our friends, who, we have reason to believe, are the friends of God. Let not then the rank, or talents of men, and still less their gaiety and dissipation, attract your regards; but let the piety of their hearts, and the holiness of their lives, be their highest recommendation to your friendship. As our blessed Lord "was not of the world, so neither must ye be:" but you must "come out from among them, and be separate," and choose for your companions "the excellent of the earth, and such as excel in virtue[f]."]

2. To those who profess godliness—

[It is not by speculative notions that you are to judge of your state, but by your spirit, your temper, your whole conduct and conversation. "The tree must be known by its fruit." Now, as the ungodly form a perfect contrast with the godly, so let your spirit and conduct be a perfect contrast with theirs. Are the

[b] Matt. iii. 12. [c] Am. ix. 9. [d] ver. 5. [e] ver. 6.
[f] Prov. iv. 14, 15. Jam. iv. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

the ungodly following the course of this world, and minding only the things of the flesh? Let it be said of you, "THEY ARE NOT so:" "their conversation is in heaven;" their delight is altogether in spiritual things; and "their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." In a word, endeavour to be as different from the ungodly world around you, as a verdant and fruitful tree is from those which are withered and dead; and know, that, if you are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for fresh supplies of his Spirit and grace, you shall receive from him such rich communications as shall be abundantly sufficient for you[s] — — —]

[s] Hos. xiv. 4—7.

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## CCCXXXII.

### OPPOSITION TO CHRIST VAIN.

Ps. ii. 1—12. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

THIS psalm in its primary sense relates to David: it declares the opposition which should be made to his establishment on the throne of Israel, and the final subjugation of all his enemies: both of which events took place according to this prediction[t]. But beyond a doubt a greater than David is here. There are several expressions in this psalm which are not at all applicable to the typical David, and which can pertain to none but the Lord Jesus

[t] 2 Sam. v. 6, 7, 17. & 2 Sam. viii. 1—15.

Jesus Christ himself. Not even the highest angel could have that said of him, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee[b]:" and, as that august title was inapplicable to David, so it could never be said of him, that he had "the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." Moreover, when it is considered, that the expression, "Kiss the Son," imported an act of divine worship; and that to "*trust* in" David would have been to give to a man the honour which was due to the Most High God alone[c]; it will be clear, that the psalm was intended to describe, not earthly, but heavenly things, even the reign of Messiah himself, "the Lord's Anointed." And of him the Jews before the coming of Christ interpreted this psalm; as the Modern Jews are constrained to acknowledge. Indeed it is manifest, that the Apostles understood it in this sense; not only because immediately after the day of Pentecost they so interpret it[d], but because in their controversy with the Jews they quote it in this sense, and argue upon it as accomplished in Christ's victory over death and the grave[e]. In reference to Christ then we will explain it, and shew,

I. The opposition that is made to him—

Christ is still, as formerly, opposed by all ranks and orders of men—

[No sooner was he born into the world than Herod sought to destroy him. During his ministry upon earth the attempts made upon his life were very numerous; and it was only by repeated miracles that he was saved. When the time for his being delivered into the hand of sinners drew nigh, the whole Jewish nation, as it were, rose up against him, to put him to death. His resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, were calculated to rectify the mistaken apprehensions of his enemies, and to disarm their malice: but no sooner was his Gospel preached by his Disciples, than the same opposition raged against them also, and every possible effort was made to suppress the rising sect: not even death itself in all its most tremendous forms was deemed too severe a punishment for those who professed to believe in Christ. In this opposition all ranks and orders joined: the learned Scribes, the self-righteous Pharisees,

[b] Heb. i. 5.
[c] Jer. xvii. 5.
[d] Acts iv. 25—27.
[e] Acts xiii. 32, 33.

Pharisees, the unbelieving Sadducees, all the highest orders both in Church and State, as well as the profane and licentious populace, were of one heart and mind in relation to this matter: they who agreed in no other thing under heaven, agreed in this, a deadly hatred to Christ, and an inveterate opposition to his cause.

And is not the same phænomenon seen at this day? In this one point there is perfect unanimity, wherever we come. As Herod and Pontius Pilate, who were before at variance, united cordially with each other for the purpose of oppressing Christ, so now persons who are most remote from each other in political and moral sentiment, or even in the general habit of their lives, all unite in decrying the Gospel as visionary in itself, and as injurious to the world. Let the Gospel be brought into any place, and this universal hatred to it immediately appears: nor can the Gospel be cordially embraced by any individual, without exciting in the minds of his friends and relatives a measure of indignation against him[f].]

This opposition is founded in an aversion to his strict and holy laws—

[Had the Apostles brought forward the Gospel as a matter of speculation only, they would never have been so bitterly persecuted in every place. The Jews were ready enough of themselves to follow false Apostles, and false Christs: and the Gentiles would have welcomed the inventors or advocates of a new philosophy. It was the requiring of all persons to submit entirely and unreservedly to the dominion of Christ that irritated and inflamed the whole world against the preachers of Christianity. Thus, at this time, if we only brought forward the great truths of the Gospel in a speculative and argumentative way, no man would be offended with us: (multitudes of preachers do this without exciting any hatred or contempt in the minds of their hearers:) but the *practical* exhibition of divine truth, the shewing that all men must receive it at the peril of their souls, the insisting upon an entire surrender of their souls to Christ, to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his grace, and to be employed for his glory, *this* is the offence: we are *then* too earnest, too strict, too enthusiastic, too alarming: we *then* are represented as "turning the world upside down," and are deemed little better than "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things." Nor will any thing screen us from this odium: we may be as learned, as blameless, as benevolent, as active as Paul himself, and yet, if we have any measure of his fidelity, we shall be sure enough to have some measure also of his treatment from an ungodly world.]

But the experience of all ages abundantly attests,

II. The

[f] Matt. x. 22—25, 34—36.

II. The vanity of that opposition—

Notwithstanding all the exertions of his enemies, Christ was exalted—

[It was "a vain thing that the people imagined," when they supposed that they could defeat the purposes of the Most High in relation to the establishment of his Son upon the throne of Israel. "He that sitteth in the heavens laughed at them, and had them in derision." In vain were the stone, the seal, the guard: at the appointed hour, Christ rose triumphant from the grave, and, on his ascension to the right hand of God, sent forth his Spirit to erect in the hearts of men that spiritual kingdom, that shall never be moved: "Yet," says God, "have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." As the purpose of Jehovah respecting the typical David was fulfilled in due season, so was that "decree which Jehovah had declared" respecting "his anointed Son." "The word grew and multiplied" in every place: and "the stone that had been cut out of the mountain without hands broke in pieces" all adverse powers, and filled the whole Roman Empire[g]. The opposition raised by the Jewish nation against the Lord and his Christ, terminated only in the confusion of the opponents, on whom "the wrath of God" soon fell, and who are to this hour the most awful monuments of "his displeasure."]

In due time his exaltation shall be complete—

[God having, in the resurrection of Christ, borne witness to him as his only-begotten Son[h], has engaged, in answer to his requests, to "give him the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." And this he is gradually accomplishing: in every quarter of the globe is the Redeemer's kingdom extending on the right hand and on the left: and though there is very much land still unsubdued before him, yet shall he "go on conquering and to conquer," "till every enemy is put under his feet." The enmity of the human heart indeed will still vent itself against him; but all who will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, "shall be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel." Whether we look to the world at large, or to any particular individual in the world, the final issue of the contest will be the same: he must prevail, and "all his enemies shall become his footstool[i]."]

Let us then contemplate,

III. Our duty with respect to him—

If He be "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords,"

Our duty is, to submit to him and serve him—

[A "*holy*

[g] Dan. ii. 34, 35. [h] Rom. i. 4. [i] Rev. xi. 15.

[A "*holy reverential fear*" becomes us in his presence: "He is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." Our fear of him should swallow up every other fear, and annihilate every desire that is contrary to his will. An external conformity to his laws will not suffice: he should reign in our hearts, and our "every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Not that our fear should be of a slavish kind: it is our privilege, and even our duty, to rejoice in him[k]: yea, we should rejoice in him with most exalted joy, even "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified:" yet should our joy be tempered with humility, and our confidence with contrition. We should never so contemplate him as to forget ourselves, nor ever so triumph in him as to lose a jealousy over ourselves: we should "rejoice in the Lord always;" but still we should so temper this heavenly feeling as to "rejoice with trembling."

With this reverential fear we should also maintain towards him *a devout affection*. Idolaters were wont to kiss their idols, in token of their entire and affectionate devotion to them[m]: hence it is said, "*Kiss* the Son," that is, let us consecrate ourselves to his service affectionately and with our whole hearts. A constrained service is altogether unacceptable to him: obedience would lose all its worth if we accounted his yoke heavy, or "his commandments grievous." His law should be in our hearts, and a conformity to it should be our supreme desire and delight.]

## This is the duty of all, without exception—

[It is a common sentiment, that religion is only for the poor, and that the rich and learned are in a good measure exempt from its restraints. But in the sight of God all men are on a level; all are equally dependent on him; all must give up an account to him; and "kings or judges of the earth" are quite as much subject to the command of Christ as the meanest of the human race. O let this awful delusion be banished! let none imagine that a superiority of rank or station at all lessens their responsibility to God, or absolves them from the smallest measure of obedience to Christ———]

## This is also our truest wisdom and happiness—

[If we say to any, "Serve the Lord," we say in effect, "Be wise:" for "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of *wisdom*." Those only who have never tasted of true piety, deride it as folly: and they only do it, because they do not like to confess their own folly in neglecting it: in their serious moments, and when their conscience is permitted to speak, the very despisers of godliness are constrained to say in their hearts, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Moreover,

[k] Phil. iii. 3. & iv. 4. [l] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[m] 1 Kin. xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2.

Moreover, it is the only true path of *happiness*: for, what happiness can they have who are obnoxious to the wrath of God? "If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little," can they endure the thought of meeting his displeasure? "Are they stronger than he," that they can feel themselves at ease, when they "have provoked him to jealousy?" No: the most careless of mankind, if he reflect at all, must be sensible, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We say then, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him:" they shall be protected by his power; they shall be preserved by his grace; they shall be enriched by his bounty; they shall be blessed by him with all spiritual blessings; and in the last day they shall be seated with him on his throne, and be partakers of his glory for evermore.]

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## CCCXXXIII.

### REGARD TO CHRIST ENFORCED.

Ps. ii. 12. *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

TO so great a degree do the Psalms abound with prophecies relating to Christ, that all the most important circumstances of his life and death, his resurrection and glory, might be narrated from them with almost as much precision as in the Gospels themselves. The psalm before us has but a partial reference to David. It may be considered indeed as a triumphant proclamation of his establishment on his throne, notwithstanding all the opposition that had been made to him by Saul and by the Jews themselves. But it principally points to the exaltation of Jesus to his throne of glory: and it concludes with an address to all the monarchs of the earth to submit themselves to his government.

In considering the words of the text, we shall call your attention to,

I. The injunction—

Who "the Son" is, we are at no loss to determine; since an inspired commentator has expressly declared it

it to be Christ[a]. By "kissing" him, we are to understand,

1. Submission to his authority—

[Samuel, having anointed Saul to be king of Israel, kissed him, in token of his submission to the power that was now vested in him[b]. Now Jesus is "seated as King upon God's holy hill in Zion[c]:" and he demands that all should acknowledge him as their supreme Lord and only Saviour[d]. His yoke in every view is hateful to us by nature; but most of all are we averse to "submit to his righteousness[e]." But this we must do, renouncing every other ground of dependence[f], and trusting in him as "The Lord our Righteousness[g]"]

2. Love to his person—

[When Mary desired to express her love to Jesus, she "kissed his feet[h]." And we also must feel in our hearts, and express in every possible way, a fervent attachment to him: the characteristic mark of his disciples is, to "love him in sincerity[i]." Destitute of this mark, we have nothing to expect but speedy and everlasting destruction[k]. We must therefore account him precious to our souls[l], yea, "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." We must delight ourselves in contemplating his beauty, and maintaining fellowship with him[m].]

3. Devotion to his service—

[Idolaters used, in worshipping their gods, to kiss their images[n], or to kiss their hands in token of their devout regard to them[o]. In this sense also are we to "kiss the Son," exercising the same faith in him that we do in the Most High God[p], and honouring him in every respect as we honour the Father.[q] ——— To kiss him, like Judas, and betray him, will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.]

The vast importance of this injunction will appear, if we consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

And here we notice,

1. The danger of disobeying it—

[Gracious and loving as the Saviour is, he is susceptible of anger on just occasions, and feels a holy indignation against those

[a] Compare ver. 7. with Heb. i. 5. [b] 1 Sam. x. 1. [c] ver. 6.
[d] Compare Isai. xlv. 23, 24. with Rom. xiv. 11.
[e] Rom. x. 3. [f] Phil. iii. 9. [g] Jer. xxiii. 6.
[h] Luke vii. 38. [i] Eph. vi. 24. [k] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.
[l] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [m] 1 John i. 3.
[n] Hos. xiii. 2. 1 Kin. xix. 18. [o] Job xxxi. 26, 27.
[p] Acts ix. 6. John xiv. 1. [q] John v. 23.

those who slight his love. And, "if once his wrath be kindled, yea but a little," it will utterly destroy us[r]. It will be but little consolation to us to see others suffering under his heavier displeasure: the person who feels the smallest portion of his wrath in hell, will be inexpressibly and eternally miserable: and therefore it becomes us to offer him the sincerest tribute of our affection without delay. Nothing but this can prevent our ruin. In whatever "way" we are walking, we shall "perish from it," if we do not embrace him with the arms of faith, and "cleave to him with full purpose of heart[s]."]

2. The benefit arising from obedience to it—

[What was before metaphorically represented by "kissing of the Son," is here more simply expressed by "trusting in him." In fact, a cordial and entire confidence in him, as "our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," comprehends all the duties which we are capable of performing towards him in this world.

Now such a trust in him renders a man inconceivably blessed. It brings peace into his soul: it obtains for him the forgiveness of all his sins: it secures "grace sufficient for him," and "strength according to his day." It makes him "blessed" in every state; in health or sickness, in wealth or poverty, in life or death. It entitles him to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance in heaven. No creature that possessed it, ever perished. Glory and honour and immortality are the portion of "all that trust in Christ." Whatever may have been their past conduct, or however they may doubt their own acceptance with God, they "*are*" blessed, and *shall be* blessed for evermore.]

APPLICATION—

[Here then is the direction which in God's name we give to all; "Kiss the Son." If you have any desire to escape the wrath to come, or to lay hold on eternal life, this is the sure, the only way of attaining your end. Neglect Christ; and, whatever else you either have or do, it will avail you nothing: you must "perish" everlastingly[t]. Love the Lord Jesus Christ, and give yourselves up unto him; and, notwithstanding your past sins, or present infirmities, "you shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life[u]."]

[r] Rev. vi. 15—17. [s] Heb. ii. 3.
[t] Luke xiv. 24. & John iii. 36. [u] John iii. 15, 16.

## CCCXXXIV.

### GOD'S FAVOUR THE ONLY SUBSTANTIAL GOOD.

Ps. iv. 6: *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!*

SELF-SUFFICIENCY pertains to God alone: he alone is independent on any other for his own happiness. The creature must of necessity be dependent, and must derive its happiness from some other source. The angels around the throne are blessed only in the fruition of their God. Man, of course, is subject to the same necessity of seeking happiness in something extraneous to himself: and unhappily, through the blindness of his understanding, the perverseness of his will, and the corruptness of his affections, he seeks it in the creature rather than in the Creator. Hence the universal inquiry spoken of in our text, "Who will shew us any good?" But there are some whose minds are enlightened, and whose desires center in their proper object; and who, in answer to the proposed inquiry, reply, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!"

To illustrate the wisdom of their choice, we will consider more at large,

1. The world's inquiry—

A desire of good being natural, it is of necessity universal—

[From infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age, the inquiry is continued, Who will shew us any good? who will shew us any thing wherein our minds may repose, and find the largest measure of satisfaction? Agreeably to this universal sentiment, all prosecute the same object, in the ways wherein they think themselves most likely to attain it. The *merchant* seeks it in his business, and hopes that in due time he shall find it in the acquisition of wealth. The *soldier* looks for it in the dangers and fatigues of war, and trusts that he shall find it in the laurels of victory, the acquisition of rank, and the applause of men. The *traveller* searches for it in foreign climes, in expectation that he shall possess it in an expansion of mind, and in those elegant acquirements, which shall render him the admiration of the circle in which he moves. The *statesman* conceives he

he shall find it in the possession of power, the exertion of influence, and the success of his plans. The *philosopher* imagines, that it must surely be found in his diversified and laborious researches; whilst the *devotee* follows after it with confidence in cloistered seclusion, in religious contemplation, and in the observance of ceremonies of man's invention. Others pursue a widely different course. The *voluptuary* follows after his object in a way of sensual gratification, and in the unrestrained indulgence of all his appetites. The *gamester* affects rather the excitement of his feelings in another way; and hopes, that, in the exultation arising from successful hazard, and from sudden gain, he shall enjoy the happiness which his soul panteth after. The *miser*, on the other hand, will neither risk, nor spend more than he can avoid; but seeks his good in an accumulation of riches, and a conceit, that he possesses what shall abundantly suffice for the supply of all his future wants. We might pursue the subject through all the different departments of life; but sufficient has been said to shew, that all are inquiring after good. True indeed it is, that many seek their happiness in evil, as the drunkard, the robber, and all other transgressors of God's laws. But no man seeks evil *as evil;* he seeks it under the idea of *good*, and from the expectation that, *circumstanced as he is*, the thing which he does will, *on the whole*, most contribute to his happiness.]

This inquiry after good is in itself commendable, and proper to be indulged—

[The brute creation are directed by instinct to things which are conducive to their welfare: but man must have his pursuits regulated by the wisdom and experience of others, to whom therefore he must look up for instruction. But it is much to be regretted that the generality inquire rather of the ignorant than of the well-instructed, and follow their passions rather than their reason. If men would but go to the holy Scriptures, and take counsel of their God, they would soon have their views rectified, and their paths directed into the way of peace.]

To such inquiries we proceed to state,

II. The Believer's answer—

The Believer's answer comes not from his head merely, but from his heart. There he has a fixed and rooted principle, which tells him, that happiness is to be found in God alone: so that, despising in comparison all other objects, he says, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me!" "In thy favour is life," and "thy loving-kindness is better to me than life itself."

That

That a sense of the Divine favour is the best and greatest good, will appear from the following considerations:

1. It gives a zest to all other good—

[Let a man possess all that the world can bestow, the greatest opulence, the highest honours, the kindest friends, the dearest connexions, his happiness will after all be very contracted, if he have not also the light of God's countenance lifted up upon him. But let him be favoured with the Divine presence, he will taste, not the comfort merely that is in the creature, but God's love in the creature. This will be like the sun shining on a beautiful prospect, every object of which receives a ten-fold beauty from his rays; whilst the spectator himself, revived with its cheering influence, has his enjoyment of them exceedingly enhanced. Here David, amidst all his elevation to dignity and power, found his happiness[a]: and here alone, whatever else we may enjoy, can it be truly found[b].]

2. It supplies the place of all other good—

[Let a person be destitute not only of the fore-mentioned comforts, but also of health, and liberty, and ease, yet will he, in the light of God's countenance, find all that his soul can desire. Behold Paul and Silas in prison, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges; are they unhappy? No; they sing; they sing aloud at midnight: and what is it that thus enables them to rise above all the feelings of humanity? it is their sense of the Divine presence, and of his blessing upon their souls. And in like manner may the poorest and most destitute of all the human race exult, if only the love of God be shed abroad in his heart: he may adopt the language of St. Paul, and speak of himself "as having *nothing*, and yet possessing *all things*[c]."]

3. It paves the way to all other good—

[Earthly blessings may come alone: but the favour of God brings along with it every other blessing that God can bestow. Even earthly things, as far as they are needful, are "added to those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness:" and we need scarcely say what peace, and joy, and love, and holiness in all its branches, are brought into the soul in the train of a reconciled God. We may confidently say with Paul, "All things are yours, if ye are Christ's[d]."]

4. It will never cloy—

[There

[a] Ps. xxi. 1—6.

[b] Ps. cxliv.; in the close of which, David corrects, as it were, what he had said in the two preceding verses.

[c] 2 Cor. vi. 10. [d] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

[There is no earthly gratification which may not be enjoyed to satiety: but who was ever weary of the Divine presence? in whom did a sense of God's pardoning love ever excite disgust? A man "in a fulness of earthly sufficiency may be in straits[e]:" and it not unfrequently happens, that the rich have less comfort in their abundance than the poor in their meaner and more scanty pittance. But "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it[f]:" the man who possesses it has not his enjoyment lessened by repetition or repletion; but, on the contrary, has his capacities enlarged in proportion as the communications of God's favour are enlarged towards him.]

5. It will never end—

[Whatever we possess here, we must soon bid farewell to it: whether our enjoyment be intellectual or corporeal, it must soon come to an end. But the favour of God will last for ever, and will then be enjoyed in all its inconceivable fulness, when death shall have deprived us of every other enjoyment. "In God's presence there is a fulness of joy; and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore[g]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are seeking happiness in the things of time and sense—

[We ask the votaries of this world, Whether they have ever found that permanent satisfaction in earthly things which they once hoped for? Has not the creature proved itself to be "a broken cistern that can hold no water?" and is not Solomon's testimony confirmed by universal experience, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit?" If this then be true, why will ye not avail yourselves of that information, and go for all your comforts to the fountain-head? "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? "Hearken diligently unto me; and eat ye that which is GOOD; and let your soul delight itself in fatness[h]." O let the blessing which the priests of old were authorized to pronounce, be the one object of your desire[i]! and we will venture beforehand to assure you, that you shall never seek for it in vain. After other things you may inquire, and labour in vain: but the man that looks to God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, and desires above all things his favour, shall never be disappointed of his hope.]

2. Those who are seeking their happiness in God—

[Professing as you do that God is a sufficient portion, the world will expect to find that you are superior to the world, and that you live as citizens and expectants of a better world. Thus it was

[e] Job xx. 22. Prov. xiv. 13. [f] Prov. x. 22. [g] Ps. xvi. 11.
[h] Isai. lv. 2. [i] Numb. vi. 24—26.

was that the saints of old lived [k]; and thus must we live, even as our blessed Lord himself set us an example. If the world hear you inquiring, Who will shew me any good? and see you seeking it in the vanities of time and sense, will they not say, that religion is an empty name, and that it can no more satisfy the soul than their vanities can do? O give not reason for any such sentiment as this! but let it be seen, that in having God for your portion, you have a good, which none can estimate but those who possess it, and which the whole world are unable either to diminish or augment [l].]

[k] Heb. xi. 9, 10. [l] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

## CCCXXXV.

### THE WORKINGS OF UNBELIEF AND OF FAITH.

Ps. xi. 1—7. *In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain: for, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart: if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness: his countenance doth behold the upright.**

THE Psalms are a rich repository of experimental knowledge. David, at the different periods of his life, was placed in almost every different situation in which a Believer, whether rich or poor, can be placed: and in these heavenly compositions he delineates all the workings of his heart. He introduces too the sentiments and conduct of the various persons who were accessary either to his troubles or his joys; and thus sets before our eyes a compendium of all that is passing in the hearts of men throughout the world. When he penned this psalm, he was under persecution from Saul, who sought his life,

* The three first verses of the psalm should be read as one continued speech, just as they are here *printed*: then the force and spirit of the passage is made clear.

life, and hunted him "as a partridge upon the mountains." His timid friends were alarmed for his safety, and recommended him to flee to some mountain where he had a hiding-place; and thus to conceal himself from the rage of Saul. But David, being strong in faith, spurned the idea of resorting to any such pusillanimous expedients, and determined confidently to repose his trust in God.

Thus in this psalm we see, in a contrasted view,

I. The counsels of unbelief—

Unbelief always views the dark side of a question; and not only keeps out of view those considerations that should animate and encourage the soul, but suggests others which are most injurious to its welfare:

1. It magnifies the difficulties we have to encounter—

[Doubtless the dangers which encompassed David were great and imminent: the arrows with which his enemies sought to kill him, were already on the string, pointed at him, as it were, and needing only to be drawn, in order to pierce him to the heart: the foundations also of law and justice were so entirely subverted under the government of Saul, that there was nothing to prevent the wicked from executing their murderous plots. But still there was no sufficient ground for that desponding question, "What can the righteous do?" Methinks the question under *any* circumstances is not only unbelieving, but atheistical: for if there be a God, and that God be a hearer of prayer, the question should rather be, "What *cannot* the righteous do?" Let us look at an instance or two, as a specimen of what *one* righteous may do, even when according to human appearance the circumstances may be most desperate. The whole army of Israel is appalled at the sight of one gigantic warrior: yet a young stripling, with his sling and stone, destroys the giant, and puts to flight the whole army of the Philistines. Again: at a period when idolatry so prevailed in Israel, that Elijah thought himself the only worshipper of Jehovah in the whole land, one righteous man stems the torrent, destroys the priests of Baal, and demolishes all his temples and altars throughout the country. But another instance of singular importance is that of Oded[a]; who, by his own unaided expostulation, liberated two hundred thousand captives, and constrained their victorious enemies not only to restore them to their homes without injury, but to treat them

[a] 2 Chron. xxviii. 9—15.

them with a tenderness truly parental ——— Shall any one, after such instances as these, and many others that might be mentioned, ask, "What can the righteous do?" We should remember, that, as "with God all things are possible," so "all things are possible to him that believeth;" yea, "if we have faith only as a grain of mustard-seed, we may root up trees or mountains, and cast them into the depths of the sea."]

2. It prompts to the use of unbecoming expedients—

[However it might be proper for David to use prudential cautions, and not to put himself directly into the hands of Saul, it did not become him to "flee as a bird to his mountain," just as if he had no refuge in his God. His duty was, to repose a confidence in God, and to expect assuredly the accomplishment of all God's promises towards him, in spite of all the efforts of his most malignant enemies. But such is constantly the voice of unbelief: it bids us not wait God's time, but contrive some way for ourselves, lest peradventure God should have forgotten his engagements, or not be able to fulfil them. Thus it operated in Rebecca. She knew that God had designed the blessings of the birthright for Jacob, her younger son: but when she saw that Isaac's intention was in the space of an hour or two to give them to Esau, she conceived that the Divine purpose would be frustrated, if she did not instantly interpose for its accomplishment. To what a system of falsehood and treachery she had recourse, is too well known to need any recital: but it is a striking instance of the tendency of unbelief. And who does not feel this tendency in his own heart? Who has not at some unhappy moment sought, by dissimulation or concealment, to avoid the cross, which a more faithful confession of the Saviour would have brought upon him? But to use any indirect means either to avoid an evil or to obtain a good, is a certain proof of an unbelieving heart: for, "He that believeth will not make haste."]

In the noble reply of David to his friends, we behold,

II. The dictates of faith—

It is the peculiar province of faith to "see Him who is invisible;" and in all situations to have respect to God,

1. As an Almighty Sovereign—

[Mark the answer which David, with holy indignation, gives to his timid advisers: "How say ye to my soul, Flee?" How say ye with desponding apprehension, "What can the righteous do?" This is my answer to all such vain fears; "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven."

What

What plots can men or devils form, which God does not see? or what can they essay to execute, which he cannot defeat? He that sitteth in the heavens "laughs them to scorn." "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprise;" yea, "he taketh the wise in their own craftiness." It is not possible to find a more beautiful elucidation of this subject than that which is recorded in the history of Elisha. When the king of Syria was warring against Israel, behold, all his plans were made known to the king of Israel; and were thereby defeated. But how were these secrets made known? Was it by treason? No: God revealed to Elisha the things which the king of Syria spake in his bed-chamber. The king of Syria determined therefore that he would kill Elisha, and sent an army to encompass the city wherein Elisha was. Elisha's servant, just like David's friends, cried, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" But, when God opened his eyes, he saw the whole surrounding atmosphere filled with horses of fire and chariots of fire: and soon afterwards he saw the whole army smitten with blindness, and led by the prophet into the very heart of their enemy's country[b]. Thus are all the saints watched over by an Almighty Power; and under his protection they are safe.]

2. As a righteous Judge—

[It may be that God sees fit to let the enemies of his people prevail over them: but their success is only for a moment: the time is near at hand when the apparent inequality of these dispensations will be rectified; when God, as "a righteous Judge, will recompense tribulation to those who trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest." He *narrowly inspects*[c], not the actions only, but the dispositions also, of men, in order to render unto them according to their works: "the wicked his soul hateth;" and in due time "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest," even as he did upon Sodom and Gomorrah: yes, "this shall be the portion of their cup;" and they "shall drink it to the very dregs." On the other hand, "he loveth the righteous, and beholds them with delight;" and reserves for them a weight of glory proportioned to all that they have done and suffered for him. The Believer is persuaded of this: whom then shall he fear? He knows that no weapon formed against him can prosper, unless Infinite Wisdom has ordained that it shall; and that no evil can be suffered to approach him which shall not be recompensed an hundred-fold even in this life; and much more in that world where God himself will be the unalienable portion of all his people. How these views compose

[b] 2 Kin. vi. 8—20.

[c] "*His eyelids try*" as persons narrowly inspecting some very minute object, almost close their eyelids, to exclude every other object.

compose the mind may be seen throughout all the Sacred Records[d]: and they will always be realized in proportion to our faith.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who meet with opposition in their Christian course—

[You are tempted perhaps by Satan, and by timid friends, to "put your light under a bushel," instead of causing it to "shine before men for the glory of your God." But you should say as Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee? No: my Saviour shunned not the cross for me; and, God helping me, I will gladly take up my cross and follow him——— Beware how you listen to flesh and blood, or attempt to reconcile the services of God and mammon: to "follow the Lord fully" is the only true way to present peace and everlasting happiness.]

2. Those who are ready to faint by reason of spiritual conflicts—

[It is doubtless an arduous task to "wrestle with all the principalities and powers of hell;" but, "if God be for you, who can be against you?" Do not, because of some occasional darkness, say, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God:" but know, that your God is infinite both in wisdom and power; and that he is engaged to keep all who trust in him[e]. Reject then with indignation the unbelieving suggestions of your great Adversary: and, if for a moment he prevail against you, chide yourselves for your cowardice, as David did; "Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? HOPE THOU IN GOD[f]." Consider the force of our Lord's reproof to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God[g]? The same then he says to us: let us therefore "never stagger at his promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." Let David's confidence be ours also[h].]

[d] See Ps. vii. 10—17. & xxvii. 1. [e] Isai. xl. 27—29.
[f] Ps. xlii. 11. [g] John xi. 40. [h] Ps. v. 11, 12.

## CCCXXXVI.

### CHARACTER OF THOSE THAT SHALL BE SAVED.

Ps. xv. 1—5. *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour,*

*neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned: but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury; nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved*.*

IN the Ministry of the Gospel, every subject must occupy that measure of attention which seems to have been paid to it in the holy Scriptures. We must not be deterred from speaking of the principles of Christianity, because some despise them as *evangelical*; nor must we omit the practical parts of our religion, because others may discard them as *legal*. We should be equally ready to consider every part of God's revealed will, neither rejecting any, nor magnifying any beyond its due importance. The psalm before us is altogether of a practical nature. On what occasion it was written, we are not informed: but we think it not improbable, that it was composed after David had carried up the ark to Mount Zion, and placed it in the tabernacle. From that event he would be naturally led to reflect on the character of those who would be approved of God in ministering before it, and, consequently, to depict the character of those who should be counted worthy to serve God in his temple above.

Agreeably to this view of the psalm, we may consider it as containing,

I. An inquiry into the character of those who shall be saved—

We must remember, that the inquiry does not respect *the way of salvation*, but *the character of those who shall be saved*. Had it related to the way of salvation, the great doctrines of "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" must of necessity have been set forth: however they might have been expressed in terms suited to that dispensation, they could not possibly have been omitted. But

* This psalm is one of those appointed to be read on *Ascension Day*; not because it relates to Christ's ascension, but because it draws the character of those who, like him, shall be admitted into heaven.

But the inquiry is simply this; What is the character, and what the conduct, of those who shall be finally admitted into that true tabernacle which God himself has erected in heaven? And can there be any inquiry more important?

OBSERVE,

1. What is implied in the inquiry itself—

[Certainly it implies, that *all* will not be saved. And this is a truth which our blessed Lord has confirmed beyond a doubt[a]. Some dream of annihilation; and some of heaven: but what a fearful disappointment will multitudes experience! Yes: "fearfulness will surprise them;" and, instead of dwelling in the bosom of their God, they will "dwell with devouring fire, even with everlasting burnings[b]."]

2. What is implied in it as addressed to Jehovah—

[It is of Jehovah himself that David makes the inquiry: for it is Jehovah alone that can answer it aright. Man is partial in his own favour: and, even when constrained to acknowledge that there must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked, he takes care so to draw the line, as to include himself among the number that shall be saved. But God has no respect of persons: his word is fixed: and according to that word shall be the doom of every child of man.]

That we may with certainty determine the point, let us see, in this psalm,

II. Their character described—

The children of God are here faithfully described: they are distinguished by,

1. A principle of integrity in their hearts—

[It is the very essence of the Christian character to have righteousness and truth residing in the soul: we must be "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile." Where a principle of integrity is wanting, nothing can be right. Services, of whatever kind, are of no account with God, if there be not a determination of heart to do whatsoever he commands. A single eye is that which he approves: and the want of it vitiates all that a man can do, yea, and renders it odious in his sight[c]. We are aware that these assertions are strong: but they do not in the least exceed the truth. St. John's declarations leave us no room to doubt: "He that doeth righteousness, is righteous, even as HE, that

[a] Matt. vii. 13, 14.

[b] Isai. xxxiii. 14. compared with ib. 15. which will be cited in another place.

[c] Isai. lxvi. 3.

that is, Christ himself, is righteous[d]." The object of the Christian's desires, yea, and of his endeavours too, is universal holiness: he would in all things, as far as possible, "be conformed to Christ," "having the same mind as was in him," and "walking in all things as he walked." He would not willingly retain a right hand or a right eye that caused him to offend: his one labour and ambition is, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." It is in this way that he "puts on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and it is in this way that "Christ becomes all in all[e]!"]

2. A corresponding conduct in their lives—

[The particular things enumerated by the Psalmist are for the most part overlooked, as though they were of minor importance: but, in truth, they enter deeply into the Christian character, and will serve as most decisive tests of the existence and measure of our integrity. In true Christians, then, the following marks are found:—

*They abstain from uncharitable censures.*—Amongst false professors, even as amongst the ungodly world, there is a lamentable want of tenderness to the characters of others: they will receive, and circulate, a false report, without ever considering how great an injury they do to him who is thus calumniated. They will suffer their minds to be prejudiced against a brother without any just occasion; and will even feel more alienation from him on account of some quality which they disapprove, than attachment to him for many qualities which render him worthy of their esteem. But the true Israelite will not deal out such measure to his neighbours: he will rather put a favourable construction on the things which admit of doubt, and cast a veil over the faults which are too plain to be denied. He will in this matter conform himself to the golden rule, of 'Doing to others as he would have them do to him.'

*They observe equity in estimating the characters of men.*—They will not be lenient towards offences in the rich, which they condemn with severity in the poor; nor will they suffer their regards to be influenced by the pride of life or the prejudice of party. Magistrates indeed they will reverence as bearing an authority vested in them by God himself; but it is the office that they will reverence; just as Paul reverenced the high priest, notwithstanding the injustice with which he executed his high office: but the contemners of God will, *as such*, be pitied and contemned by every true Christian; and those who fear God will *on that account* be loved and honoured by him, whatever station they may fill, or to whatever party they may belong. He will from his

[d] 1 John ii. 4, 6. & iii. 6—10.

[e] See Rom. xiii. 14. & Col. iii. 11.; which passages refer, the one to the *graces* of Christ, and the other to *the image of Christ in the soul.*

his inmost soul unite in the Apostle's benediction, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

*They adhere strictly to all their engagements.*—No Believer will think lightly of his word, and still less his oath. If he have promised any thing, he will on no account go back, even though the performance of the promise should involve him in considerable difficulty. In all pecuniary or commercial transactions, his word will be his bond: no subterfuges will be resorted to, no equivocations, no falsehoods invented, to invalidate his engagement: if he have "sworn to his own hurt," he will submit to the consequences, and discharge his conscience with fidelity. With respect to engagements of a yet more sacred nature, he will exercise the utmost scrupulosity, and not because of any change in *his own* mind think himself at liberty to repudiate a betrothed object. If a great moral or religious change have taken place in *the one party* so as to change the character of that person, and to render him in fact a different person from the one that was betrothed, then *the other* party may justify a renunciation of the alliance, (a man may justly rescind his engagements with a woman who shall depart from the paths of honour and virtue;) but it is in the party who remains the same, and not in the party that is changed, that this right resides. Where there are no circumstances of this kind to absolve the Christian, "his yea must be yea, and his nay, nay."

*They abhor every thing that is sordid and unjust.*—Usury was forbidden under the Mosaic Law; and that prohibition, *as to the spirit of it*, obtains equally under the Gospel. There is a *legal* interest of money which may fitly and properly be made: but every kind of extortion is worthy of the utmost abhorrence. To take advantage of the ignorance or the necessities of our fellow-creatures, to deceive them in relation to the quality or quantity of the commodities sold to them, to lean unduly to our own interests, and thereby to injure in any respect the interests of others, all this is contrary to the law of love, the law of honesty: and the man who for filthy lucre sake will condescend to such meanness, is unworthy of the Christian name. It matters not what profession of religion he may make, nor how high he may stand in the estimation of those who are unacquainted with his character; he has "the mark of the beast upon him," and will assuredly take his "portion amongst the hypocrites.

We are aware that many religionists will call this statement *legal:* but let them remember, that Paul himself has given this very description of the Christian's conduct, and has declared, that "those who are children of the light will walk in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth[ee]. By these fruits must they be judged of, and "by these fruits must they be known."]

In

[ee] Eph. v. 8—10.

In relation to persons of this character, we behold with pleasure,

III. Their salvation assured—

Our blessed Lord represents them as persons whose habitation is founded on a rock[f], and their stability is assured to them,

1. By the very graces which they exercise—

[We do not mean to say, that any man, however eminent, has in himself such a measure of grace, as shall be a safeguard to him under all temptations; for even Paul himself had not in himself "a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" nor can any child of man stand one moment longer than God shall be pleased to uphold him in his everlasting arms: but still God himself has represented "righteousness as a breast-plate," which will resist the darts of our great adversary: and it must be obvious, that they, in whom there is a principle of universal holiness, and whose conduct is so strictly regulated by the commands of God, must be comparatively out of the reach of the tempter. In matters of daily occurrence, the Believer will still have within himself an evidence that he is a fallen creature: he will still be subject to mistakes, and infirmities, and falls; but he will not so fall as to return to the wilful practice of iniquity[g], nor so be moved as to "turn back unto perdition."]

2. By the express promises of God—

[Were the Christian's stability to depend solely on the strength of the gracious principle within him, he would have but little hope of enduring to the end: but God has encouraged us to exert ourselves, and to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;" in the full persuasion, that "he will give us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." In the Scriptures, both Prophets and Apostles concur in giving us this assurance. *Isaiah speaks almost the very language of our text:* he draws the very same character almost in the very same terms; and then declares, that this person "shall *dwell on high*," (even "in God's holy hill,") that "his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; that bread shall be given him, and his waters shall be sure[h]." To the same effect St. Peter speaks: he bids us add to our faith the practice of all social virtues; and then he tells us that "they who do such things *shall never fall*," ('never be moved,') but shall have an entrance ministered unto them abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[i]." How "exceeding great and precious are such promises" as these! How delightful is it to hear God himself engaging to "keep the feet

[f] Matt. vii. 24—27.
[g] 1 John iii. 9.
[h] Isai. xxxiii. 15, 16.
[i] 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

feet of his saints," and that "*the righteous* shall hold on his way, and that *he who hath clean hands* (the very persons described in our text) shall wax stronger and stronger[k]!". Let this then stir us up to walk worthy of our high calling; and let us "be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, KNOWING *that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*[l]."]

[k] Job xvii. 9. [l] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

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## CCCXXXVII.

### GOD HIMSELF HIS PEOPLES' PORTION.

Ps. xvi. 5—7. *The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night-seasons.*

THIS psalm is called "Michtam," that is, A golden psalm. And a golden psalm it is, whether we interpret it of David, or of Christ. To both it is applicable; to David, as a type of Christ; and to Christ, as so typified. In all the word of God there is not a passage on which greater stress is laid, as establishing beyond a doubt the Messiahship of Jesus; to whom alone the latter part of the psalm can with any truth be literally applied[a]. The former part of it, on the contrary, is much more applicable to David himself. The truth is, I apprehend, that David began to write respecting himself; but was overruled and inspired to speak things which he himself did not fully comprehend, and to declare *literally* respecting the Messiah, what was only *in a very lax sense* true in relation to himself. This we know to have been the case with the Prophets generally: they were inspired to predict the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, whilst they themselves understood not their own prophecies[b]. They spoke of one point which was uppermost in their own minds; and God overruled them to speak in language that was applicable rather to another point,

[a] Acts ii. 25—31. & xiii. 35—37. [b] 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

point, which he had ordained them to foretell. Thus did Caiaphas the high priest, when advising that Jesus should be put to death[c]: and thus did David, in this and several other of his psalms[d]. We consider the words of our text, together with all that precedes it, as spoken by David respecting himself: and in them we see,

I. The blessed portion of God's people—

They have "God himself for their portion and their inheritance"—

[There seems in this expression some reference to the custom which obtained of sending to different guests, when assembled at a feast, such a portion as the Master of the feast judged expedient[e]. But the principal allusion evidently is to the division of the land of Canaan by lot, and the assigning to all the different tribes the portion prepared for them. On that occasion the tribe of Levi was distinguished from all the other tribes in this, that whereas all the rest had a distinct and separate inheritance allotted to them, *they* had none; the Lord himself vouchsafing to be *their* inheritance[f]. The sacrifices which from time to time were offered to the Lord were appointed for their support. Now, in allusion to this, David says, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." He was not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah: and therefore respecting him it could be true only in a spiritual and mystical sense: and in that sense it is equally true respecting every believer at this day. We are all "a kingdom of priests:" and we live altogether upon the great sacrifice, even the flesh of Christ, and the blood of Christ, which were offered for the sins of the whole world. By the very terms of the New Covenant, God, whilst he takes us for his people, gives himself to us as our God[g]: so that all who believe in Jesus may claim him as their God." This, I say, is not the privilege of Prophets and Apostles only, but of every the weakest Believer in the Church of God': for we are expressly told, that *to as many as received him* Jesus gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed in his name[h]." The very instant they believed in Christ, the relation between God and them was formed, and God became their Father, their Friend, their Portion, "their eternal great Reward[i]." To us then belongs this privilege as well as to David; and with him we may say, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord[k]."]

This

[c] John xi. 49—52. [d] 22d, 40th, 69th.
[e] Gen. xliii. 34. 1 Sam. i. 4, 5.
[f] Numb. xviii. 20. Deut. xviii. 1, 2. [g] Jer. xxxi. 31—33.
[h] John i. 12. [i] Gen. xv. 1. [k] ver. 2.

This portion too is secured to them—

[Israel in Canaan were surrounded with enemies on every side: but God, who had allotted to every tribe its portion, engaged to "maintain their lot." Even when all the males assembled thrice a year at Jerusalem, God undertook to be a Protector of their families and their possessions: and to this hour would they have enjoyed their inheritance, if they had not by their transgressions provoked God to forsake them. But *us*, who have HIM for our inheritance, he will not forsake: as he has said, "The Lord will not forsake his people; because it hath pleased him to make you his people[l]:" and again, "I will never leave thee; I will never, never forsake thee[m]." Not but that he will punish us for our transgressions; and so punish, as to make us feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him: but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his truth to fail[n]." It is not with us as with Israel in Canaan: they were left to forfeit and to lose their lot: but God, in his mercy, engages to preserve our inheritance for us, and us for it[o]: and not only never to depart from us, but so to put his fear in our hearts that we may not depart from him[p]."

Such then is thy portion, O Believer; and such is thy security, that it shall be continued to thee.]

And is such the inheritance of all God's people? We shall not wonder then at,

II. The feelings which they have in the contemplation of it—

Behold how David expresses,

1. His delight in it—

[All the pious amongst the Israelites would find some reason to be pleased and delighted with the portion that was assigned them. To some their proximity to the sea would be a matter of joy; to others, their pasturage; to others, their rocks and fortresses: so that all in their respective places would say, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." But how well may *they* adopt that language who have the Lord for their portion? Tell me, Believer, what else canst thou want? What can add any thing unto thee? What is there which thou dost not find in thy God? If thou possessest ever so great a portion of earthly goods, are they not all as dung and dross in comparison of this? Or, if thou art destitute even as Lazarus himself, is not all sense of indigence lost in the contemplation of thy better wealth? What the worldling has, he holds by a very uncertain tenure, and that only for a moment: but

[l] 1 Sam. xii. 22. [m] Heb. xiii. 5, 6. [n] Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.
[o] 1 Pet. i. 5. [p] Jer. xxxii. 38—40.

but what thou hast is secured to thee by the promise and oath of God, and is to be enjoyed by thee with ever augmenting zest for ever and ever. Say, Dost thou not in this survey of thine inheritance pity those who can rest in any earthly portion? Art thou not ready to weep over them as maniacs, who fancy themselves kings and emperors, whilst they are but little elevated above the beasts; yea, in some respects inferior to them, because they fulfil in a far less degree the true ends of their creation? Well indeed mayest thou exult when thou surveyest thy portion! When thou beholdest the sun and moon and stars, together with this globe whereon thou standest, and callest to mind, that the Maker of them all is thy Friend, thy portion, thine inheritance; methinks it is almost strange that the contemplation is not too much for frail mortality to bear. To be lost in wonder, and be swallowed up in ecstacy, is no more than what may be expected of thee from day to day.]

2. His thankfulness to God for it—

[David clearly saw that of himself he would never have chosen such a portion as this. His earthly mind would have been as groveling as that of others, if God himself had not "counselled him," and discovered to him the vanity of all earthly good. Amidst the various trials which he had endured, God had drawn nigh to him; and in the night-seasons of affliction had instructed him, and had revealed himself to him in all his beauty and excellency and glory. Thus he had enabled David to make a fair estimate of the portion offered him, as compared with that which the world around him enjoyed. In this view of the mercy vouchsafed unto him, David says, "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night-seasons." And is it not thus with every Believer? Do you not know assuredly, that of yourselves you would never have chosen God for your portion? Are you not well convinced, that you would "not have chosen him if he had not chosen you," or "loved him, if he had not first loved you?" Did you not even hold out against his counsels for a long time, till he forced conviction on your mind, and "made you willing in the day of his power?" If you have been kept awake in the night seasons, and "your reins instructed you," till with a compunction you were "pricked to the heart;" or, if you have been visited with trials that were necessary to wean you from the things of time and sense, do you not bless him for it, and for "the instruction which he then sealed upon your mind[q]?" Yes, and with your whole hearts. You see in what a portion you would have rested, if these means had not been used to bring you to a better mind; and, if they had been a thousand times heavier than they were, you would now account them as unworthy of a thought, in comparison

[q] Job xxxiii. 15—20.

comparison of the blessings, to the possession of which they have introduced you. I hear you adoring God, and saying, "I know that in very faithfulness thou didst afflict me:" for "before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy law." Go on then blessing and praising God; and never forget that "by the grace of God you are what you are."

To those who possess not this portion, I will "give a word of COUNSEL" in the name of the Lord—

[Survey the portion of the worldling, and see how empty it is. Look back on all that thou hast enjoyed, and see how little solid comfort it has afforded——Then survey "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Think what it must be to say of God, "O God, thou art my God;" and of Christ, "Thou art my Friend, and my Beloved"———Then turn to the holy Scriptures, and see what counsel God has given thee there: "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness[r]." Nothing does God desire more than to give himself to you for a portion, if you will but receive him. He complains, "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." "How often would I have gathered you, and given myself to you, but you would not!" Dear Brethren, let God choose your inheritance for you: and he will be as much delighted to enrich your souls, as ever you can be to be enriched by him. Indeed by imparting himself to you, he himself will be enriched: for he regards you as his property, and says of you, "The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance[s]."]

2. To those who already enjoy this portion, I will offer a word of CONGRATULATION—

["Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance[t]:" yes, "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord[u]." I ask not what you possess, or what you want: if you had empires, they could add nothing to you; and if you want bread to eat, it can take but little from you. Look at Paul and Silas when in prison, and their backs torn with scourges: their situation was to them as "the very gate of heaven[x]." So, if only you live nigh to God, and in the near prospect of the eternal world, you also shall be happy under all circumstances whatsoever. Imitate for once the worldling who is just about to take possession of his inheritance: with what joy he surveys it, and anticipates the delight which he will experience in the full possession of

[r] Isai. lv. 1, 2. [s] Deut. xxxii. 9. [t] Ps. xxxiii. 12.
[u] Deut. xxxiii. 29. [x] Acts xvi. 25.

of it! Thus go ye, and survey your inheritance. See the state of those who are now possessed of their entire lot. Behold how they feast in the presence of their God! Think, if you can, what God is to them[y]: and know, that their bliss is yours, in all its fulness, and for ever. Think how you will then "bless the Lord for giving you counsel." Live then now as persons sensible of their privileges; and say, as ye may well do, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage."]

[y] Rev. xxi. 4, 5.

## CCCXXXVIII.

### THANKSGIVING FOR ANY GREAT DELIVERANCE.

Ps. xviii. 50. *Great deliverance giveth he to his King; and sheweth mercy to his Anointed, and to his seed for evermore.*

THE Psalm before us is also recorded in the Second Book of Samuel[a]. There it stands, as it was drawn up at first by David for his own immediate use: but here it is inserted, with some slight alterations and improvements, for the use of the Church in all ages. The title informs us on what occasion it was written, namely, on David's deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and especially from the hand of Saul. But, as in most of his psalms, so in this, David speaks, not in his own person only, but in the person of the Messiah, whose type he was. It is a composition of very peculiar beauty: the figures are extremely bold, and the poetry is sublime. Of course the expressions are not to be so literally taken, as if they were an unadorned relation of facts: some of them are altogether figurative; and were verified, not at all in the letter, but only in the Spirit: some are more applicable to David himself, and others to Christ: but altogether it is a poem highly wrought, and exquisitely finished. It is our intention to set before you,

I. The diversified import of this psalm—

The psalm admits of a threefold interpretation;

1. Histo-

[a] Ch. xxii.

1. Historical, as it relates to David—

[*David from his youth experienced many troubles.*—From the moment that Saul's envy and jealousy were awakened by the fame of David's exploits, this youth became the object of his incessant persecution; insomuch, that he was forced to flee for his life, and for several years was kept in constant fear of falling a sacrifice to the rage of Saul ——— "The sorrows of death and hell compassed him," as it were, continually[b].

*But his deliverances were great and manifold.*—Repeatedly did he, almost by miracle, escape the stroke of the javelin that was cast at him; and frequently did God in a visible manner interpose to keep him from falling into the hands of Saul. Once he was in the midst of Saul's army, and in the very same cave with Saul; and yet was preserved by God, so that neither Saul nor any of his soldiers could find it in their hearts to touch him. "David in his distress called upon the Lord; and God heard him out of his holy temple," and delivered him[c].

*These deliverances he acknowledges with devoutest gratitude.*—Here the Psalmist, borne as it were on eagle's wings, soars into the highest region of poetic imagery: he calls to mind the wonders which God had wrought for Israel of old, and represents them as renewed in his own experience. The glorious manifestations of Jehovah on Mount Sinaï were not more bright in his eyes[d], nor the passage of Israel through the Red Sea more wonderful[e], than were the displays of almighty power and love which he had seen in his behalf[f]. In these deliverances he further acknowledges the equity of God in having so vindicated his character from the undeserved calumnies by which his enemies had sought to justify their cruelty towards him[g].

*From the experience of past mercies, he expresses his confidence in God under whatever trials might yet await him.*—It is delightful to see how careful he is to ascribe all the glory of his preservation to that God who had delivered him[h]; ——— and the full persuasion that his victory would in due time be complete[i]. Then with profoundest gratitude he blesses and adores his heavenly Benefactor for all the mercies he has received; recapitulating as it were, and giving us the substance of the whole, in the words of our text[k].

Were we to view the Psalm only as an historical record, it would be very instructive: but it has a far higher sense: it is,]

2. Prophetical, as it relates to Christ—

[That it is a prophecy respecting Christ and his Gospel, we are assured by one whose testimony is decisive on the point. St. Paul,

[b] ver. 4, 5. [c] ver. 6. [d] ver. 7—14. [e] ver. 15.
[f] ver. 16—19. [g] ver. 21—27. [h] ver. 28—42.
[i] ver. 43—45. [k] ver. 46—50.

Paul, maintaining that Christ, though himself "a Minister of the circumcision," was to have his Gospel preached to the Gentiles, and to establish his kingdom over the heathen world, expressly *quotes the words immediately preceding our text, as prophetic of that event*[l]. Here therefore we see it *proved*, that David spake as a type of Christ; and a clue is given us for a fuller understanding of the whole psalm.

Behold then in this psalm our adorable Redeemer: behold *his conflicts!* He was indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" "nor was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow:" "his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men." How justly it might be said of him, that "the sorrows of hell compassed him," we learn from his history: "Now," says he, "is my soul sorrowful even unto death." In the garden he was in such an agony, that he sweat great drops of blood from every pore. And on the cross he uttered that heart-rending cry, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" In that hour all the powers of darkness were let loose upon him: and God himself also, even the Father, combined to "bruise him," till he fell a victim to the broken law, a sacrifice, "a curse[m]."

But speedily we behold *his deliverances*. Like David, "he cried to the Lord in his distress:" "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears; and was heard, in that he feared[n]." In him the elevated language of the Psalmist obtained a more literal accomplishment: for at his resurrection "the earth quaked, the rocks rent;" and together with him, as monuments and witnesses of his triumph, "many of the dead came forth from their graves, and went into the city, and appeared unto many." O what a deliverance was here! "The cords of death were loosed; (it was not possible that he should any longer be held by them:") and he rose triumphant from the grave: yea, he ascended too to heaven, and was there seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, all the angels and principalities and powers of heaven, earth, and hell, being made subject unto him. In comparison of this display of the Divine glory, the images referred to in this psalm were faint, even as a taper before the sun.

Then commenced *his victories*. Then was literally fulfilled that prediction of the Psalmist, "A people whom I have not known shall serve me; as soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me[o]." No less than three thousand of his murderers were converted in the very first sermon: and soon his kingdom was established throughout the whole Roman Empire. This prediction is yet daily receiving a more enlarged accomplishment: thousands in every quarter of the globe are submitting themselves to him; and in due season, all the kingdoms of the world will acknowledge him

[l] Rom. xv. 9.
[m] Gal. iii. 13.
[n] ver. 6. with Heb. v. 7.
[o] ver. 43, 44.

him their universal Lord. The triumphs of David over the neighbouring nations, though signal, were nothing in comparison of those which Christ is gaining over the face of the whole earth: and he will "go on conquering and to conquer," "till all his enemies are put under his feet." O blessed and glorious day! May "the Lord hasten it in his time!"

But like many other passages of Scripture, the psalm admits also of an interpretation, which is,]

3. Spiritual, as it relates to the people of God in all ages—

[The circumstance of its having been altered, and set apart for the use of the Church, shews, that, in substance, it exhibits the dealings of God with his people in all ages. They, like David, and like their blessed Lord and Master, have their *trials*, their *deliverances*, their *triumphs*; in all of which God is greatly glorified, and for which he ought ever to be adored. Who amongst us that has ever been oppressed with a sense of guilt, and with a fear of God's wrath; who that has felt the tranquillizing influence of the Redeemer's blood sprinkled on his conscience, and speaking peace to his soul; who that has been enabled to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to serve his God in newness of heart and life; who, I say, that has experienced these things, does not find, that the language of this psalm, figuratively indeed, but justly, depicts the gracious dealings of God towards him?———Methinks, the sentiment that is uppermost in the mind of every such person is, "Who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God[p]?"]

But this part of our subject will receive fuller illustration whilst we notice the psalm in reference to,

II. The use we should make of it—

The practical use of Scripture is that to which we should more particularly apply ourselves; and especially should we keep this in view in reading the Psalms, which, beyond any other part of the sacred volume, are calculated to elevate our souls to heaven, and to fill us with delight in God. From this psalm in particular we should learn,

1. To glorify God for the mercies he has vouchsafed unto us—

[We should never forget what we were, whilst dead in trespasses and sins, and what we are made by the effectual working of God's grace in our souls. The change is nothing less than "passing from death unto life," and "from the power of Satan unto

[p] ver. 31.

unto God:" and when we contemplate it, we should be filled with wonder and with love on account of the stupendous mercies we have received. We should ever remember, "Who it is that has made us to differ" from those who are yet in darkness and the shadow of death: and the constant frame of our souls should be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." We may indeed without impropriety on some occasions say, as the Psalmist, "*I have* pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them; *I have* wounded them, that they were not able to rise;" but we must soon check ourselves, like St. Paul, and say, "Yet not *I*, but the grace of God that was with me:" "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing, is God." It is worthy of particular observation how anxious David is to give to God all the glory of those exploits which he commemorates; "*By Thee* I have run through a troop; and *by my God* I have leaped over a wall[q]"——Let us imitate him in this respect, and "give unto our God the glory due unto his name:" yea, "let our mouths be filled with his praise all the day long."]

2. To confide in God under all future difficulties—

[In what exalted terms David speaks of God at the commencement of this psalm[r]!——Verily, *he* had profited well from his past experience. And ought not *we* to profit in like manner? Ought not *we* to remember what God is to all his believing people? If we have God for our God, what have we to fear? Can any enemy prevail against us, when HE is on our side? Remember how God reproved those of old, who, when danger threatened them, gave way to terror, instead of trusting confidently in their God: "Say ye not a confederacy, a confederacy, &c. but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary[s]." Whatever be your want, know that He is able to supply it——whatever be your difficulty, He can make you triumphant over it——"His way is perfect: his word is tried: he is a buckler to all those who trust in him[t]."]

3. To conduct ourselves so that we may reasonably expect his blessing—

[Though God is found of them that sought him not, and dispenses his blessings altogether sovereignly and according to his own good pleasure towards the ungodly world, he proceeds, for the most part, in a way of equity towards his own peculiar people. The declaration that was made to king Asa is found true in every age: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you[u]." Precisely to the same effect are those expressions of the Psalmist, "With the upright, the merciful, the pure, thou wilt

[q] ver. 29. See also ver. 32—36, 47—49. [r] ver. 2.
[s] Isai. viii. 12—14. [t] ver. 30. [u] 2 Chron. xv. 2.

wilt shew thyself upright, and merciful, and pure; but with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward," or, as it is in the margin, "thou wilt *wrestle*." "Thou wilt save the afflicted people (i.e. the humble); but thou wilt bring down high looks[x]." If we walk uprightly and circumspectly before him, and in an humble dependance on his grace, there is not any thing which he will not do for us: but, "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us." Inquire then whether you are really "keeping the ways of the Lord," and are "keeping yourselves from *your* iniquity," that is, from the peculiar sin to which, by constitution, by habit, or by your situation in life, you are most exposed[y]. I charge you before God, that you all make this a matter of serious inquiry. The "besetting sin," ah! it is that which separates between God and our souls; it is that which "keeps good things from us." How many are there, who, whilst they make a profession of religion, are yet, by their unmortified lusts, or worldly desires, or slothful habits, or by some habitual evil, provoking God to depart from them! Beware lest it be so with you; and "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." You may grieve him, till you altogether "quench" his sacred motions. We intreat you to be upon your guard against this so fatal an evil. "Keep your hearts with all diligence:" yea, "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." Then shall God delight himself in you, and be not only your present portion, "but your everlasting great Reward."]

[x] ver. 25—27. [y] ver. 21—23.

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## CCCXXXIX.

### EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S WORD.

Ps. xix. 7—9. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.*

GOD has not left himself without witness even amongst the most unenlightened heathens. His works testify of him: the heavens and the earth declare his eternal power and godhead. They speak silently indeed,[a] but intelligibly, to every child of man; so that idolaters of every name are absolutely without excuse.

[a] ver. 3. The words printed in *Italics* are not in the original.

excuse[b]. Wherever the light and genial influence of the sun extend, there is God proclaimed as an infinitely wise and gracious Being. But *we* have a richer source of instruction opened to us: we have a revelation, which, whilst it proclaims the existence and attributes of Jehovah, makes known to us his will, and points out the path in which we may approach him with a certainty of acceptance: and so extensively was that published by our Lord and his Apostles, that it might be said even in that age, "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world[c]." It is of this written word that David speaks in the psalm before us: in which are set forth,

I. Its parts and properties—

The various terms here used to designate the word of God, may be considered as directing our attention to all the different parts of that word; each of which has, annexed to it, an appropriate epithet of commendation—

["The *law* of the Lord" is in the marginal translation called, "The doctrine of the Lord;" and it may be understood as including under one general term all that is afterwards more particularly specified: and it is so "perfect," that nothing can be taken from it, or added to it, but at the peril of our souls[d] ——— "The *testimony* of the Lord" is "the Gospel of the grace of God[e]," even "the witness which God has testified of his Son[f]." It is "the record that God has given of his Son, namely, that in him is eternal life; and that he who hath the Son, hath life; and he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life[g]." Now this is "sure," so sure, that it may be relied upon with the most implicit confidence: "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners[h]."—"The *statutes* of the Lord" are those ordinances which God appointed under the ceremonial law to shadow forth all the glorious mysteries of the Gospel, and which were "right" for the time then present, though since the introduction of the clearer light of the Gospel they are abrogated as burthensome and unnecessary. Not but that there are some still in force, such as the Sabbath, and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And these may well be called "right:" for who can

[b] Rom. i. 19, 20.
[c] Compare ver. 4. with Rom. x. 18.
[d] Rev. xxii. 18, 19.
[e] Acts xx. 24.
[f] 1 John v. 9.
[g] ib. ver. 11, 12.
[h] 1 Tim. i. 15.

can doubt the propriety of a certain portion of our time being dedicated to the especial service of Him to whom we owe our very existence? or who can question the suitableness of those easy and instructive rites, whereby we are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ at first, and afterwards commemorate from time to time the wonders of his dying love?—"The *commandment* of the Lord" is the moral law, in which we are taught, in what way we are to serve and please our God. And this is "pure," and "holy[i]:" it is given to regulate, not our words and actions only, but the inmost thoughts and desires of our hearts. It is indeed "exceeding broad[k]," extending to every motive and principle of the mind, yea, to every inclination, affection, appetite of the soul, and requiring the whole to be in a state of constant and entire conformity to the will of God.—"The *fear* of the Lord" we consider as another name for the holy Scriptures, only putting, as is frequently done, the effect for the cause[l]. The word of God, as *inculcating* and *exciting* the fear of the Lord, is "clean;" its one object is, to cleanse and purify the souls of men. Hence our Lord says, "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you[m]." Moreover, the word, in this view of it, "endureth for ever," since its operation is uniform to the end of the world; and the purifying effects produced by it, will continue through all eternity.—"The *judgments* of the Lord" are his warnings and threatenings; which though questioned by men as false, or condemned by them as unjust, are yet "true and righteous altogether." We are very incompetent judges of the demerit of sin, or of the conduct which God, as the moral Governor of the universe, has thought proper to pursue: but we are assured, that, when he shall inflict on the impenitent the judgments he has denounced against them, all his intelligent creatures will exclaim, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty!" "just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints!"]

As the different terms which we have considered are not so definite in their import but that they admit of different interpretations, we shall wave the further consideration of them; and, comprehending them all

[i] Rom. vii. 12. [k] Ps. cxix. 96.

[l] The author would be understood to speak this with diffidence, because he is not aware that any Commentator has put this construction on the words: but he considers any other interpretation as unsuitable to the context. Somewhat similar occurs Gen. xxxi. 42. where God is called, "The fear of Isaac;" where not the *act*, but the *object*, of Isaac's fear is spoken of. If this sense be not approved, the Reader may understand the words as signifying, *The worship of God.* [m] John xv. 3. Compare also Eph. v. 26.

all under one general term, 'The word of God,' we shall proceed to notice,

II. Its use and excellence—

It would occupy too much time to enter fully into this subject: let it suffice to notice those particular uses which are mentioned in our text. The word then is of use,

1. To illuminate the mind—

[Previous to the application of the word to the heart by the Holy Spirit, we are in utter darkness: but "the entrance of God's word giveth light." Truly it is a "marvellous light that we are brought into," when our eyes are opened to discern "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"——— Nor is it the learned only who receive instruction from it: it is intended more especially for the poor. There is something in the Gospel which tends rather to offend the proud, but is most palatable and delightful to the humble. Hence we are told, "It maketh wise the simple." What astonishing views of God, of Christ, of the human heart, of the evil of sin, of the beauty of holiness, of the felicity of heaven, have many unlettered persons attained! Yet it is in the knowledge of these things that true wisdom consists: and this knowledge is imparted to all who embrace the Gospel, in proportion to the simplicity of their minds, and the devotedness of their hearts to God. These are "the things," which, as our blessed Lord informs us, "are hid from the wise and prudent, and are revealed unto babes." Without such a special illumination of the mind, the most learned philosopher cannot comprehend them[m]; and by such an illumination the most untutored savage shall be "made wise unto salvation."]

2. To convert the soul—

[Truly "the word is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." It is "the rod of God's strength," even that wonder-working rod, which subdues all his enemies before him. "Like fire, it melts; and like a hammer, it breaketh the rock in pieces." See its effects upon the three thousand on the day of Pentecost! such is its operation, wherever "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." It humbles the proudest spirit, and subdues the most obdurate heart to the obedience of faith. Nor is it to the adoption of new principles only that it brings the soul, but to the acquisition of new habits; so that it becomes set on *Christ* and heavenly things, as once it was set on *self* and earthly things: it assimilates the soul to Christ as the great exemplar, and "changes it into the divine image, from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit of our God."]

3. To

[m] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

3. To rejoice the heart—

[Ignorant men imagine, that the application of God's word to the soul is productive only of pain and sorrow: but those who have ever "tasted of the good word of life" have found, by happy experience, that it fills them "with joy and peace in believing," yea, "with joy unspeakable and glorified." The word is to them the charter of all their privileges, and the map of their everlasting inheritance. As an heir peruses with delight a will in which great wealth is unexpectedly bequeathed to him, so the Christian finding in every page of the Sacred Volume his title to all the blessedness and glory of heaven, how can he but rejoice in such records? how can he but concur with David in saying, "They are more desired by me than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb?"]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. Our privilege—

[If it was the highest privilege of the Jews, that "to them were committed the oracles of God," much more are we distinguished, who have the writings of the New Testament superadded to those of the old. Let us learn to estimate this privilege aright. Let us remember, that in this blessed volume is contained all that can be needful either for the instruction of our minds, or the salvation of our souls: and, whilst we enjoy this inestimable blessing ourselves, let us labour by every possible means to communicate it to others———]

2. Our duty—

[We should "search the Scriptures daily," "digging into them as for hid treasures," and praying earnestly to God, that he would "open our understandings to understand them." We should look to them as the ground of all our hopes, and the rule of all our conduct. To study the book of nature will be well: but to study the Sacred Volume with prayer will tend to our highest perfection, and will "thoroughly furnish us unto every good word and work."]

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## CCCXL.

### PRAYER AGAINST SINS OF INFIRMITY AND PRESUMPTION.

Ps. xix. 12, 13. *Who can understand his errors! Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

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THE moral law, as revealed in the Scriptures, is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and is therefore a mirror in which we may see how deformed we are through the introduction and dominance of sin. It was from a contemplation of its transcendent excellence that the Psalmist was led to bewail his want of conformity to it, and to implore mercy at the hands of God for his innumerable violations of it, and grace, to preserve him from any wilful opposition to it in future. And the more we study it, the more shall we be disposed to adopt the petitions in our text, "Cleanse me" from the guilt I have already contracted; "Keep me" from falling a sacrifice to my sinful propensities.

We all need to be delivered from,

I. Sins of infirmity—

These are innumerable—

[It is not of gross outward sin that we are here to speak, but of "errors" and "secret sins," that is, such sins as escape the notice of ourselves as well as of others.

Consider the sins arising *from defect*. The law requires that we love God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength; and our neighbour, under whatever circumstances, *as ourselves*. Now, if we trace the whole extent of our duty to God, as our Creator; to the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer; and to the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier; if we further pursue into all the different relations of life our duty to our fellow-creatures, and reflect that the smallest short-coming in the performance of it is sin; and then, if we reflect how great our short-comings are, even when we exert ourselves to the uttermost to fulfil the will of God; we shall see that, under this head alone, our sins are more numerous than the sands upon the sea shore; since, in fact, we have been doing nothing but sin from the very first moment that we came into the world.

But besides the guilt we have contracted through defect, consider that which has arisen *from deviations* from the precise line of duty which we should have followed. We may conceive of an arrow shot in the right line towards an object, though it fall short of the object itself: and so we may conceive of our attempts to serve God, as perfect in point of aim, though defective in force and energy. But there is a bias in our fallen nature which causes innumerable aberrations from the perfect line of duty. In duty, of whatever kind it be, the principle ought to be as pure as the light itself: but in us it never is so: some-

what

what of a corrupt mixture will be found in every thing we do. There is so much blindness in our understanding, so much perverseness in our will, and so much sensuality in our affections, that we are imperceptibly drawn aside; our very judgment is deceived; yea, "our mind and conscience are defiled;" so that, when we would do good, evil is present with us;" and, when we do, as we think, act entirely as unto the Lord, the heart-searching God beholds a mixture of *self* in our best motives, that serves yet further to vitiate and debase our best actions.

To all this add our *actual transgressions*, by thought, word, and deed, against the holy commands of God. It is still of "secret sins" only that I am speaking, and of such as may justly be called sins of infirmity. But how vast the aggregate of evil which has arisen in our hearts from the secret workings of pride, or worldliness, or impurity, or unbelief, or some other corrupt feeling of our fallen nature! Yet not one of these has been unobserved by God, nor will one be kept out of sight in the final judgment.

Well then may we even in this superficial view of our past errors and deviations say, "Who can understand them?"]

We need therefore to cry earnestly to God to "cleanse us from them"—

[The guilt in which they involve the soul is exceeding great: nor can it be purged away but by the atoning blood of Christ. The circumstance of their having been unobserved by us does not lessen the guilt of them, as we imagine; but only shews how blind and ignorant we are, and how vitiated and debased that soul must be which can harbour such evils unconscious of their malignity, and almost of their very existence. God himself cautions us against regarding this as an extenuation, which, if rightly viewed, is rather an aggravation, of our guilt. "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the Angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands[a]?" An atonement was offered by the high priests of old "for the *errors* of the people[b]:" and in the atonement of Christ must we seek refuge from all which have been, however inadvertently, committed by us. This is strongly intimated by the offerings which were appointed for all without exception, when they erred; but which differed according to the degree of criminality which might justly attach to persons, by reason of their advantages for knowing better, and the injury that was likely to accrue from their example[c]. But none were excused: the very moment that their error was pointed out to them, they were to bring their offering: and through that alone could they obtain absolution from their sin[d].

We

[a] Eccl. v. 6. [b] Heb. ix. 7.
[c] Lev. iv. 1—35. [d] Lev. v. 17—19.

We should therefore, all without exception, pray with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Yea, we should also pray with him, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" For "God requireth truth in our inward parts:" and, if we are not thus "renewed in the spirit of our minds," we cannot hope for admission into that city "where no unclean thing can enter[e]."]

Yet, after all, our guilt from these is light in comparison of that which ariseth from our,

II. Sins of presumption—

These differ widely from the former; being committed, not from mere inadvertence or infirmity, but with the concurrence of the will in opposition to the dictates of an enlightened conscience. Yet in speaking of these we shall not confine ourselves to those grosser sins, from which more moral and decent persons are exempt; but shall turn your attention rather to that state and habit of life which conscience must condemn, as well as the more flagrant transgressions.

Consider what "presumptuous sins" are—

[They are any sins whatever that are committed against light and knowledge, or on a presumption that God will not punish them in the eternal world.

Now it is perfectly well known to all of us, that we ought to have "the fear of God before our eyes:" we ought to stand in awe of God's judgments: we ought to search out and execute his commands. We ought not to live unto ourselves, but unto him: and to make his word the unvaried rule of our conduct. We know that we have duties also towards our adorable Redeemer; and that, as we should live altogether by faith in him, so we should live altogether to his glory. Now, if we are habitually neglecting these duties, and living to ourselves and to the world, what is our life but one continued course of presumptuous sin? — — — I wish that the more moral, decent, and conscientious part of my audience would attend to this, that they may see how great their deficiencies are, and how awful their guilt.]

To these we are ever prone—

[Every man by nature rushes into them, even as a horse into the battle: nor can any but God "keep us back" from them. How daring we are in the commission of them, is plain from numberless passages of Scripture, where the language of the carnal

[e] Rev. xxi. 27.

carnal heart is depicted; "Tush! God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it." We have a general notion about God's mercy: and from the very hope that he will forbear to execute the award of justice, we are encouraged to proceed in our career of sin; thus "turning the very grace of God into licentiousness," and "continuing in sin with the hope that grace will abound." And what an ascendant these sins will gain over us may be daily seen, not only in the impieties of those who never knew any thing of God, but in the degeneracy of many, who once gave promises of better things. The gradations of such persons' departure from God are strongly marked by the Psalmist: they first "*walk* (transiently) in the *counsel* of the *ungodly*, (who from their want of real piety are dangerous advisers;) they then learn to *stand* (deliberately) in the *way* (and habits) of the wicked; and then come to *sit* (habitually and at their ease) in the *seat* of the *scornful*[f]." And this is no other than what every presumptuous sinner has reason to expect: for God is indignant against him, in proportion as his transgressions partake of this horrid aggravation. Of the heathen it is said, "They liked not to retain God in their knowledge; therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind[g]:" and even of his own people Israel themselves, God says, "Israel would none of me: so I gave them up[h]." What wonder then if he should say of us also, "They are joined to idols: let them alone[i]?" If instead of crying mightily to God to "keep us back" from presumptuous sins, we yield ourselves willingly to the commission of them, we can expect nothing, but that they should "have the entire dominion over us," and constrain God to "swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest." This, I say, we may well expect: for God has declared, that]

If not delivered from them in time, we shall suffer the punishment of them to all eternity—

[How heinous they are in the sight of God may be known from hence; that, though sacrifices were appointed for sins of infirmity, none were prescribed for any presumptuous sin whatever: the offender was to be cut off without mercy from the people of the Lord[k] ——— The servant that knew not his Lord's will and did things contrary to it, was yet accounted worthy of some punishment: but he who knowingly violated his Lord's commands, was "beaten with many stripes[l]." And Capernaum's doom, we are told, shall be more severe than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, because of the deeper malignity which her superior advantages infused into all her sins[m].

Let me then intreat you to adopt the prayer in our text: beg of

[f] Ps. i. 1. [g] Rom. i. 8. [h] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. [i] Hos. iv. 17.
[k] Numb. xv. 27—31. [l] Luke xii. 47, 48.
[m] Matt. xi. 23, 24.

of God that he would enable you to "understand your errors;" (for who without Divine instruction can understand them?) and that he would "cleanse you" from them; and that he would "keep you back" from every presumptuous sin: for though every presumptuous sin is not the unpardonable transgression, yet, I must say, that presumptuous sin, continued in after warnings and exhortations to depart from it, hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and endangers the being given up by God to final impenitence.]

APPLICATION—

Be prevailed upon, Brethren,

1. To regard sin as the greatest of all evils—

[Such indeed it is, whether ye will believe it or not. You may be ready to think that suffering is the greatest: but suffering may tend to good: it may, like the furnace, purify us from our dross, and prepare us, under God's gracious care, as vessels of honour for our Master's use. But sin defiles, debases, and destroys the soul. "Fools may make a mock at it;" but it will "sting like a serpent, and bite like an adder:" it may be sweet in the mouth, but it will be gall in the stomach. See, Brethren, from what a mass of guilt and corruption you need to be delivered! See also what judgments are hanging over your devoted heads! O that I could see you in earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life! Be ye not like that perverse and daring people, who, when remonstrated with by the prophet, replied, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee: but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth[n]." Neither deceive yourselves by endeavouring to vindicate yourselves before God: for, whatever you may say to extenuate your guilt, your sins even of infirmity need forgiveness; and your sins of presumption, if not repented of and forgiven, will plunge you into remediless and endless ruin.]

2. To improve the present moment in order to obtain deliverance from it—

[*Now* you can offer the prayer of David: but how long that privilege will be continued to you, you know not. This however you know, that your views of sin will soon be changed, either in this world or in the world to come. Conceive of a presumptuous sinner, dying in his iniquity, and first having his eyes opened in the eternal world: What does he then think of all his past excuses, on which he once placed such confident reliance? What, if he were permitted to address you from his abode of misery, would be the scope of his admonitions? Can you doubt? and, if not, will

[n] Jer. xliv. 16, 17.

will you still go on in those ways, which your own consciences condemn? But, as the rich man was not suffered to return from hell to warn his surviving brethren, who were walking in his steps, so neither will any be sent from the dead, to instruct you. You have Moses and the Prophets; and those you must both hear and obey: and, if you will not believe them, nothing awaits you but to "eat the fruit of your own doings, and to be filled immediately with your own devices." Now, however, you are warned: now, I trust, your consciences attest the truth and importance of all that ye have heard: and now I conclude with that solemn admonition of St. James, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin[o]."]

[o] Jam. iv. 17.

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## CCCXLI.

### TRUST IN GOD, THE MEANS OF SUCCESS.

Ps. xx. 7. *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.*

ASTONISHING is the success of united prayer: nor are any so situated as not to need the intercessions of others. David, though so great and powerful, stood in need of them: and he here records the benefit he received from them[a]— — —

The Psalmist here records,

I. The different grounds of men's confidence—

The generality make the creature their confidence—

[This prevailed universally among the heathen— — — And it too generally pervaded the Jewish nation also— — — We too, in all our straits and difficulties, are prone to it; leaning to our own understanding— — — resting on our own resolution — — — and undertaking every thing in a dependence on self— — —]

The only proper ground of confidence is God—

[He alone is all-sufficient— — — With him every thing is easy— — — David abhorred the idea of resting on any other[b] — — — Hence he adopted the resolution in the text.]

II. The correspondent issues of their confidence—

Those

[a] See, and quote the whole preceding context.

[b] Ps. cxxi. 1, 2. & xi. 1—4. Mark the *spirit* of these passages.

Those who depend on the creature are disappointed—

[This has frequently been the case[c]——— And it is only what may be expected[d]——— Creature-confidence arms God against us[e]——— and entails his curse on all who indulge it[f]———]

But those who depend on God succeed—

[So did Asa[g]——— So did Jehosaphat[h]——— So did Hezekiah[i]——— So did David[k]——— And so shall all, even to the end of the world[l]———]

INFER,

1. What obligations do we owe to God for the mercies we have now received[m]!———

2. What shall not they receive who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?———

[c] 1 Kin. xx. 23. [d] Ps. xxxiii. 17. [e] Isai. xxxi. 1, 3.
[f] Jer. xvii. 5, 6. [g] 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12.
[h] 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15, 20. [i] 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 21.
[k] ver. 8. [l] Ps. xxxiv. 22. & cxxv. 1, 2.
[m] Here bring forward the particular circumstances for which the Thanksgiving is appointed.

## CCCXLII.

### THE KINGDOM OF DAVID AND OF CHRIST.

Ps. xxi. 1—7. *The King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever. His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the King trusteth in the Lord; and, through the mercy of the Most High, he shall not be moved.*

THIS psalm is appointed by the Church to be read on the day of our Lord's Ascension: and on a close examination, it will appear to be well suited to that occasion. We will,

I. Explain

I. Explain it—

In its primary and literal sense, it expresses David's gratitude on his advancement to the throne of Israel—

[After acknowledging, in general terms, God's goodness towards him in this dispensation, he speaks of his elevation as an answer to his prayers, though in its origin it was altogether unsolicited and unsought for[a]. Impressed with the greatness of the honour conferred upon him, he exults in it, especially as affording him an opportunity of benefiting others[b]; and declares his confidence, that his enemies, so far from ever being able to subvert his government, shall all be crushed before him[c]—

Passing over this view of the psalm, we proceed to observe, that]

It is yet more applicable to Christ, as expressing his feelings on his ascension to the throne of glory—

[David was a type of Christ, as David's kingdom was of Christ's kingdom: and Christ, on his ascension to heaven, may be considered as addressing his Father in the words of this psalm.

He declares his joy and gratitude *on account of the blessedness vouchsafed to him*, and *on account of the blessedness which he was now empowered to bestow on others*. With respect to his own blessedness we observe, that *his conflicts were now terminated*. These had been numerous and severe. From his first entrance into the world to the instant of his departure from it, he "was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." View him especially during the three years of his Ministry, what "contradiction of sinners against himself did he endure!"——— View more particularly the four last days of his life, what grievous and accumulated wrongs did he sustain!——— Consider his conflicts also with the powers of darkness, and the terrors of his Father's wrath——— O what reason had he to rejoice in the termination of such sufferings, and to magnify his Father who had brought him in safety through them! For this he had prayed; and God had given him the fullest answer to his prayers[d]. Now also *he was restored to glory*. He had "a glory with the Father before the worlds were made[e]:" and of that glory he had divested himself when he assumed our nature[f]. But now he was restored to it: and what a contrast did it form with that state, from which he had been delivered! A few days ago he had not where to lay his head: now he is received into his Father's house, his Father's bosom. Lately he was derided, mocked, insulted, spit upon, buffeted, and scourged by the vilest of the human race; and now he is seated on his throne of glory,

[a] ver. 1—4. [b] ver. 5, 6. [c] ver. 7—12.
[d] Heb. v. 7. with ver. 2, 4. [e] John i. 1, 18. & xvii. 5.
[f] Phil. ii. 6—8.

glory, and worshipped and adored by all the hosts of heaven ——— Great indeed was the glory that now accrued to him, and great "the majesty that was now laid upon him[g]" ——— and, as it had proceeded from his Father[h], so he justly acknowledges it as his Father's gift.

But it was not to himself only that Jesus had respect: he blesses his Father also for the *blessedness which he was empowered to bestow on others.* The words, "Thou hast made him most blessed for ever," are translated in the margin of our Bibles, "Thou hast set him to be blessings for ever." This version opens a new and important view of the subject, a view which particularly accords with all the prophecies respecting Christ. It is said again and again concerning him, that "in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed:" and we are well assured, that to communicate blessings to a ruined world is a source of inconceivable happiness to himself. We apprehend that to have been a very principal idea in the mind of the Apostle, when, speaking of Christ, he said, "Who for *the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God[i]."

With what joy must he behold *the myriads who had been exalted to glory* through the virtue of his sacrifice, whilst yet it remained to be offered! It was through "his obedience unto death" that all the ante-diluvian and patriarchal saints were saved. Our first Parents looked to him as "the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head." To him righteous Abel had respect, in the offering which was honoured with visible tokens of God's acceptance. To him Noah looked, when he offered the burnt-offerings, from which "God smelled a sweet savour[k]." In a word, it is through his righteousness that forbearance and forgiveness were exercised from the beginning, just as they will be exercised even to the end: and all who were saved before his advent are in that respect on the same level with those who have been saved since: there is but one song amongst all the glorified saints in heaven; they are all harmonious in singing "to Him that loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood, &c." What a joy must it be to Christ to see in so many myriads the travail of his soul, who "were brought forth, as it were, to God even before he travailed!" With what joy too did he then take upon him to dispense his blessings to the *myriads yet unborn!* He is "Head over all things," not for his own sake merely, but "for the Church's sake." Knowing then how many of his most cruel enemies were given to him by the Father, with what pleasure would he look down upon them, (even while their hands were yet reeking with his blood,) and anticipate their conversion to God by the influence

[g] ver. 5.
[h] Phil. ii. 9—11.
[i] Heb. xii. 2.
[k] Gen. viii. 20, 21.

influence of his Spirit on the day of Pentecost! Every child of man that shall at any period of the world participate his grace, was at that moment before his eyes; and with what delight would he view them, as drawn by his word, as nourished by his grace, as comforted by his Spirit, as made more than conquerors over all their enemies[l] ——— At that moment he saw, as it were, the whole company of the Redeemed, the multitudes which no man can number, all enthroned around him, the monuments of his love, the heirs of his glory, the partners of his throne ——— He saw that the kingdom which he had now established upon earth "should never be moved;" that "the gates of hell should never prevail against it;" and that it should stand for ever and ever[m]. Well therefore might he say, "The King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!"]

Having thus explained the psalm, we proceed to,

II. Shew what improvement we should make of it—

From *its literal sense* we learn, how thankful we should be for any blessings vouchsafed unto us—

[In many respects God has "*prevented* us with the blessings of goodness;" and in many he has given them in answer to our prayers. We may "account even his long-suffering towards us to be salvation," and much more the gift of his grace, and the knowledge of his dear Son. Can we reflect on "the salvation to which he has called us," even "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," and not be thankful for it? Can we reflect on the exaltation which we ourselves have received, from death to life, from slaves to free-men, from children of the devil to sons of God, and not rejoice in it? Can we think of our having been made "kings and priests unto God," "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," yea, partners of his throne, and partakers of his glory for evermore; can we contemplate all this, and not say, "In thy salvation how greatly shall I rejoice?" ——— Verily, if we do not rejoice and shout for joy, "the very stones will cry out against us" ———]

From *its mystical or prophetical sense* we learn what should be our disposition and conduct towards the Lord Jesus—

[Methinks, we should *rejoice in his joy*. If it were but a common friend that was released from heavy sufferings and exalted to glory, we should rejoice with him in the blessed change: how much more then should we participate in our minds the joy and glory of our adorable Redeemer! ——— But more particularly we should *submit to his government*. This is strongly and awfully suggested in all the latter part of the psalm before us.

[l] Zeph. iii. 17. [m] ver. 7.

us. "God has highly exalted Jesus, that at his name every knee should bow:" yea, he has *sworn*, that every knee *shall* bow to him; and that all who will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron. Read from the text to the end of the psalm; and endeavour to realize every expression in it——— O that we may be wise ere it be too late! Let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish:" for though now he condescends to follow us with intreaties to be reconciled towards him, the time is quickly coming, when he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."].

A further improvement we should make of this subject is, *to confide in his care*. "He is set to be blessings" to a ruined world. He has "ascended up on high that he might fill all things:" "he has received gifts, even for the rebellious;" and "has all fulness treasured up in him," on purpose that we may "receive out of his fulness grace for grace." There is nothing that we can want, but it may be found in him; nor any thing which he is not willing to bestow on the very chief of sinners. Let us then look to him, and trust in him; and assure ourselves, that, as "he lost none that had been given him" in the days of his flesh, so now will he suffer "none to be plucked out of his hands." We cannot expect too much from such a King: however "wide we open our mouths, he will fill them."

*To seek the enlargement of his kingdom* is the last duty we shall mention as suggested by the subject before us. In the prayer that he has taught us, we say, "Thy kingdom come;" and we close that prayer with ascribing to him "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever:" and it is with similar sentiments that the psalm before us concludes. Let us enter into the spirit of them, saying, "Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength; so will we sing and praise thy power." Nothing should be so dear to us as the advancement of his glory. Let us reflect, how we may best promote it; and let the extension of his kingdom be our chief joy[n]———]

[n] Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

## CCCXLIII.

### THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Ps. xxii. 11—21. *Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart*

*heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord! O my Strength, haste thee to help me! Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

IN many parts of the Psalms there is a strong resemblance between David's experience, and the experience of David's Lord; so that the language used may with great propriety be applied to both: but in some parts David speaks in terms which are wholly inapplicable to himself, and which must be understood only as referring unto Christ. This is particularly the case with respect to some expressions in the psalm before us. That a greater than David is here, there can be no doubt. The writers of the New Testament quote many parts of it as literally fulfilled in Christ, in whom alone indeed it had any appearance of accomplishment.

Let us contemplate here,

I. His complaints—

In the words we have read, he complains of,

1. The number and malice of his enemies—

[Very forcible are the terms by which he designates their characters: he compares them to fierce "bulls," and savage "lions," and ravenous "dogs:" and how justly do these images describe the enemies that assaulted him! The fat bulls of Bashan aptly represented the Governors both in Church and State, whilst the populace, both of Jews and Gentiles, were like dogs, set on indeed by others, but actuated by their native ferocity, and an insatiable thirst for blood — — — Whilst all these combined against him, he had not so much as one to comfort him, or to assuage his anguish[a]. Well might he complain of this as a great additional source of grief and sorrow — — —]

2. The greatness and variety of his sufferings—

[*As relating to his body*, he complains that his frame was emaciated, his joints dislocated, his hands and feet pierced with nails:

[a] Compare ver. 11. with Ps. lxix. 20.

nails: and that, whilst he was suspended thus a naked bloody spectacle upon the cross, some gazed at him with stupid curiosity, and others with cruel indifference amused themselves with "casting lots for his vesture." In no sense whatever was this ever verified in David: he was evidently overruled by the Spirit of God to personate the Messiah, in whom alone they were ever accomplished.

*In relation to his soul* also, much that is here spoken was uttered. Great as his bodily sufferings were, they were not to be compared with the anguish of his soul, which was transfixed with agony, long before the smallest pain was inflicted on his body[b]. He bore the Father's wrath that was due to the sins of the whole world; and this it was that so oppressed and overwhelmed him[c]. At the same time all the hosts of hell assaulted him; for "that was their hour, and the power of darkness." Under the pressure of all these things "he was poured out like water:" or rather, like the burnt-offerings which were wholly consumed with fire, he was altogether consumed, as it were, with the fire of God's wrath; insomuch that "his heart was like melted wax in the midst of his bowels."]

In the midst of all these sufferings we hear him pouring out,

II. His supplications—

How exceedingly fervent and importunate were these!

[Twice does he implore the presence of God[d], the loss of which he had so bitterly bewailed[e]: and in every diversified form does he offer his supplications for help and deliverance——— We cannot suppose that these intreaties had reference only to his bodily sufferings: no; we cannot doubt but that they related chiefly to the sufferings of his soul: it was "the sword" of God's wrath that he so importunately desired to be delivered from, and "the roaring lion," the devil, from whose assaults he so begged to be preserved. The plea which he offered on this occasion deserves peculiar notice; "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns:" yes; from his earliest infancy had his Father protected and delivered him, when Herod and other blood-thirsty enemies sought to destroy him: and the remembrance of past deliverances encouraged him to expect all the aid that his necessities should require. Such pleas are proper for us also in the hour of trouble, nor shall they ever be urged in vain[f]. If, like Jesus, we offer supplications and prayers with strong crying and tears, like him we shall be heard, if not in the

[b] Luke xxii. 44. [c] Isai. liii. 10. [d] ver. 11, 19.
[e] ver. 1. [f] Ps. lvi. 13.

the removal of the bitter cup, at least in an augmentation of our strength to drink it[s].]

Behold in this prophetic description,

1. How desperate must have been the state of fallen man!

[What must have been our state, when nothing but the intervention of such a surety could save us? O let us, in the sufferings of the Son of God, behold what miseries were due to us; — — — and let us humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes — — —]

2. How wonderful must be the love of Christ, who gave himself up to endure such things for us!

[He foreknew from all eternity what he must suffer to redeem our souls; yet he cheerfully "undertook for us." And when the sufferings were coming fast upon him, he withdrew not from his work, till he could say, It is finished. He deprecated indeed the bitter cup, on a supposition that the removal of it could by any means consist with God's purposes of mercy to a fallen world: but, if it could not, then he desired that God's will might be done, and that nothing should be withheld that was necessary for the accomplishment of man's salvation. O let this love be contemplated by us, till we burst forth into songs of praise and thanksgiving, and, under a sense of its constraining influence, devote to him the souls which he has purchased at so dear a rate!]

[s] Heb. v. 7.

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## CCCXLIV.

### DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Ps. xxiii. 1—6. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

IN reading the Psalms of David we are apt to think of him as an highly privileged person, whom we

we can never hope to resemble in the fervour of his piety, or the height of his enjoyments. But, whilst as the anointed King of Israel whom God had so particularly chosen, and as a distinguished prophet of the Lord, he was favoured with communications and supports, which we are not entitled to expect, in his more private character, as a saint, he possessed no advantage above us. His views of Divine truth were far inferior to ours: and its experience of its efficacy was no other than what may be enjoyed by every saint in every age. The psalm before us is a bright specimen of devout affection, and, in point both of composition and sentiment, is universally admired: yet it contains no other recollections than what every Believer's experience must afford, no other confidence than what every Saint is warranted to express. Considering David then as a pattern for ourselves, we shall notice,

I. His retrospective acknowledgments—

In recording the mercies of God to him, he speaks of his heavenly Benefactor under the character of,

1. A Shepherd—

[The Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, was David's LORD[a], and David's Shepherd[b]: and whatever pertains to the office of a good shepherd, he both executed for him, and will execute for us.

Is it the office of a shepherd *to provide good pasture* for his sheep? O what pasture is provided for us in the Sacred Records! David in his day could say, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters:" and if he, with so small a portion of the inspired volume in his hands, when the great mystery of Redemption was hid under a veil, and the Spirit of God was yet but sparingly bestowed upon the Church, could use such language, how much more may we, who have the meridian light of the Gospel shining around us, and the Holy Ghost poured forth in all his gracious influences, almost without measure! What views have we of the "Covenant, that is ordered in all things and sure!" of the prophecies, which have been so minutely fulfilled; and of "the exceeding great and precious promises," which are so suited to all our wants! And how abundant are our consolations, when the Comforter, the Holy Ghost,

[a] Matt. xxii. 42—45.
[b] Gen. xlix. 24. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. John x. 11.

Ghost, seals all these truths upon our souls, and witnesses with our spirits that we are the Lord's! ———

Is it the office of a shepherd *to bring back to the fold his wandering sheep, and to guide them in right paths?* how justly may we unite with David in saying, "He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake!" Mark the words, "*For his name's sake.*" It is his own glory that he has consulted in all his dealings towards us, and especially in that astonishing patience and forbearance which he has exercised towards us from day to day. Our backslidings have been so grievous, and our departures from him so frequent, that we might well have been left to perish in our sins. But he considers that his own honour is involved in the preservation of his sheep; and therefore he has never withdrawn his loving-kindness from us, or ceased to watch over us for good. It is on no other principle that we can account for our recoveries when fallen, and our preservation from ten thousand evils into which we should have fallen, if we had not been guided and upheld by him.

Is it the office of a shepherd *to protect his sheep from danger?* This he does, as well for the lambs of his flock, as for those that have attained a greater measure of strength. By "the valley of the shadow of death" we *may* understand a dying hour[c]: but we rather understand by it a season of darkness and distress. This is more agreeable to the context, and better accords with the general import of those words in Holy Writ[d]. Sheep in going from mountain to mountain and hill to hill, may easily be supposed to pass occasionally through valleys where dangers affright them, and difficulties obstruct their way: and in this respect the saints resemble them; for however rich their pastures for the most part may be, they find occasional seasons of darkness and gloom. But in such seasons the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Great Shepherd and Bishop (Overseer) of souls, is with them, and with his pastoral rod and staff protects them. It is with that rod he numbers them when they come into his fold[e], and with that he secures them from every harm. This he has promised to them in the most express terms[ee] ——— and he will fulfil it even to the end[f].]

2. A Friend—

[This is a character which God assumed in reference to Abram[ff]; and our blessed Lord honours all his faithful disciples with this endearing name: "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends[g]." Now, as the friend of his people, he uses all hospitality towards them. As in the days of old he spread a table for his people in the wilderness, where they could not otherwise have

[c] Job x. 21, 22. [d] Ps. cvii. 10, 14. Jer. xiii. 16.
[e] Lev. xxxvii. 32. Ezek. xxvi. 37. [ee] Isai. xliii. 2, 3, 5.
[f] Isai. xli. 10. [ff] ib. ver. 8. [g] John xv. 15.

have subsisted, so "he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies." Enemies we have on every side; and such enemies as would deprive us of every blessing, if they were not restrained by an invisible and almighty power. But our heavenly friend protects us from their assaults, and gives us an abundant supply of all good things, even "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Nor does he omit any thing which can possibly evince his love towards us. As a Host who delights to honour his guests, he anoints our head with oil; and as the Master of the feast, he fills "our cup" with the richest wine, so that it "runneth over." These figures, though strong and clear, very inadequately represent the communications of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit. David in another psalm says, "The Lord himself is the portion of my inheritance and my cup[h]:" and when this is the case, can it be matter of surprise that "our cup runneth over?" No indeed; for there is nothing on this side of heaven that can be compared with the manifestations of his love. Truly, "in his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."]

Whilst acknowledging thus the goodness of God to him in past times, the Psalmist does not hesitate to proclaim,

II. His prospective consolations—

These pervade the whole psalm, and arise out of every truth contained in it. Three of his assertions in particular we shall notice:

1. "I shall not want"—

[With such a shepherd, and such a friend, how could he want; or what can any one so privileged ever stand in need of? Does he not know all our wants? and is he not able to supply them[i]? Has he not absolutely pledged himself to supply them? and is there not an inexhaustible fulness treasured up in him *on purpose* that he may supply them? Do we need a righteousness wherein we may stand before God? "The righteousness of Christ shall be unto all and upon all them that believe"——Do we need grace to mortify all our corruptions, and to fulfil the whole will of God? "His grace shall be sufficient for us"——Do we need peace in our troubled breasts? He has left us peace as a legacy; "Peace I leave with with you; my peace give I unto you:" yea, "He himself will be our peace"——Even of temporal things he has said, that "they who fear him shall want no manner of thing that is good[k]." Whether we look to the blessings of time or the glories

[h] Ps. xvi. 5. [i] Phil. iv. 19. [k] Ps. xxxiv. 10.

glories of eternity, it is every believer's privilege to say, "I shall not want."]

2. "I will not fear"—

[It were presumptuous in the extreme for any one to use such an expression as this, if he looked only to an arm of flesh: for "of ourselves we have no sufficiency even to think a good thought:" but, with such a Protector as the Lord Jesus, we may laugh all our enemies to scorn. We know how powerful, how subtle, how malignant is that "roaring lion that seeketh to devour us;" and we know that we are as weak and impotent in ourselves as sheep: but if David, a man like ourselves, slew a lion and a bear that invaded his father's flock, what shall not Jesus effect in our defence? Who shall escape his eye, or who shall withstand his arm? Hear what our Lord himself says; "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places, when it shall hail, coming down on the forest, and the city shall be low in a low place[l]." Let the timid then dismiss their fears, from whatever source they may arise. "I will fear *no* evil," said the Psalmist; and we, whether we take a general view of our enemies, or enter into a distinct enumeration of them, may adopt the same triumphant language[m]. If "we know in whom we have believed, we may be assured, that he will keep that which we have committed to him against that glorious day," when all his flock shall be gathered together, and be one fold under one shepherd.]

3. Of my happiness there shall be no end—

[Behold how confidently the Psalmist speaks on this subject! "*Surely* goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." What, hast thou no doubt about this great matter? No: it shall be *surely* so. Art thou not presumptuous in speaking thus in relation to thyself? No: it shall be thus to *me*. But would it not be abundantly sufficient to say, that goodness and mercy shall not turn away from thee? No: they *shall follow* me, and that too "all the days of my life:" they shall follow me, even as my shadow does, wherever I go; "goodness," to supply my wants; and "mercy," to cover my defects. And art thou bold enough to carry this confidence beyond the grave? Yes: "*I will dwell* in the house of the Lord *for ever*;" not only serving him in his house below, but enjoying and glorifying him in his house above.

Behold here the felicity of the Saints! All the rest of the world are *following after happiness*, and it eludes their grasp; but those who believe in Jesus have *happiness following after them*: "goodness and mercy" are their attendant angels, that

[l] Isai. xxxii. 18, 19. [m] Ps. xlvi. 1—3. Rom. viii. 35—39.

that never for a moment turn aside from them, or relax their attention to them.

The ignorant world have no idea of this blessed truth: they would account it almost blasphemy to utter such language as this. But the reason is, they know not what a Shepherd, and what a Friend, we have: did they but duly appreciate his love, they would know, that nothing within the sphere of our necessities to require, or of his ability to grant, is too great for us to expect at his gracious hands.

Enlarge then your expectations, all ye who are of the fold of Christ: learn to estimate aright your privileges: see them yet more distinctly stated by the holy Psalmist[n] — — — and look forward to the full enjoyment of them in that house, where the same adorable Saviour that now ministers unto you, will continue his ministrations to all eternity[o].]

[n] Ps. xci. 15—17. [o] Rev. vii. 15—17.

## CCCXLV.

### THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST TYPIFIED.

Ps. xxiv. 7—10. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of glory.*

THE various rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were extremely useful to the Jews, not merely as means whereby they were to serve their God, but as vehicles of instruction to their minds. It is true indeed that the instruction which would be conveyed by them was very imperfect; but still it was such as best suited their infant minds, and such as was well calculated to stir up in them a desire after a fuller comprehension of the things contained in them: they were to the nation at large what the parables of our Lord were to the Scribes and Pharisees of his day; they were means of fixing the attention of the people, and of stimulating them to inquiry. But to us, who have the true light reflected on those things, they are of far greater value: for, seeing them in connexion with the things typified by them,

them, we behold a fitness and a beauty in them, which the people of God under the Jewish dispensation could have no idea of. Let us illustrate this from the psalm before us. This psalm was written on the occasion of carrying up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion. The ark was the symbol of the Divine presence: and the carrying it up in so solemn and triumphant a way conveyed to the spectators this important truth, that to have God nigh unto them, where he might be sought and consulted at all times, even in the very midst of them, was an inestimable privilege. But *we* behold in that ceremony the ascension of our blessed Lord to the heavenly Zion, whither he is gone for the benefit of all his waiting people. The character by which he is described is infinitely more intelligible to us than it could be to those who lived before his advent, and the benefit to be derived from his elevation is proportionably more clear. This will appear whilst we consider,

I. The character here given of our ascended Lord—

His ascension, as we have already said, was here represented—

[The Priests, with the Levites who bare the ark, demanded, in elevated strains, admission for it within the tabernacle that had been reared for its reception. The terms used, though not strictly applicable to the tabernacle, were proper to it in a figurative sense, as representing the heaven of heavens, the peculiar residence of the Deity. In this view it is said, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors!" The Levites within the tabernacle, on hearing this demand, are represented as inquiring in whose behalf it is made, and who this King of glory is. The reply being satisfactory to those who had the charge of the tabernacle, the ark is borne in, and deposited in the place prepared for it.

Agreeably to this representation we may conceive of Jesus at his ascension, attended by a host of ministering angels, who, on their arrival at the portals of heaven, demand admission for their divine Master. The angels within inquire who that *man* can be in whose behalf such a claim is made. Twice is the inquiry made, and twice the answer is returned; and on the entrance of the Lord into those heavenly mansions we may conceive that the

the whole celestial choir unite in one exulting acclamation, "The King of glory! the King of glory!"]

But the character here given of him deserves more attentive consideration—

[The essential dignity of our Lord is that first mentioned. As "the King of glory," and "the Lord of glory," he could claim heaven as his own. There he had from all eternity been "in the bosom of the Father:" there he had "had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made." "From thence he had descended," for the purpose of executing the Father's will. Though he had assumed our nature, and "was found in fashion as a man," yet was he from all eternity "in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God." He was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." He was "one with God," in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal: in a word, he was "the mighty God," "the great God and our Saviour," "God over all, blessed for evermore." Well therefore might his attendant angels call on the hosts of heaven to open wide the portals of those glorious mansions for his admission; since the heaven of heavens were from all eternity his proper, his peculiar residence.

But he is further described as "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." The reason of his descent from heaven had been to rescue a ruined world from the dominion of sin and Satan, death and hell. "The god of this world" had his vassals in complete subjection: as "a strong man armed he kept his house, and all his goods were in peace." But Jesus entered into conflict with him, and "bound him and spoiled his goods;" or, in other words, delivered from his sway millions of the human race, who had not only been "led captive by him at his will," but would ultimately have been "bound with him in chains of everlasting darkness." True indeed, he himself received a wound in the engagement; ("his heel was bruised:") but he inflicted a deadly wound on "the head" of his enemy[a], and vanquished him for ever. It may be said indeed that he himself died in the conflict: he did so, and appeared to be "crucified through weakness:" but it was not through weakness that he died, but in compliance with his own engagement to "make his soul an offering for sin." His death was to be the very means of victory: it was "through death that he overcame him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage." On his cross he not only "spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, but made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it:" and in his ascension "he led them captive," bound, as it were, to his chariot-wheels. This constituted a further claim to

[a] Gen. iii. 15.

to the mansions of heaven. It had been covenanted on his Father's part, that after his conflicts on earth he should be raised in his manhood to the right hand of God,-and that, thus enthroned, he should put every enemy under his feet[b]. This was now to be fulfilled: the victory was gained: and nothing now remained to complete the glorious work but the installation of Messiah on his promised throne. Hence the exulting reply to the inquiry, "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle; the Lord of Hosts, HE is the King of glory!" and, as such, he comes to take possession of his throne, and calls on all the hosts of heaven to celebrate and adorn his triumphs.]

But to participate the joy expressed in our text, we should understand,

II. The interest we have in his ascension—

It is not as a private individual that he has ascended, for then we should have mourned as Elisha did for Elijah, and as the Apostles were disposed to do, when he advertised them of his intentions to depart from them. But we have reason rather to rejoice in his departure, yea, far more than if he had continued upon earth to the present hour[c]: for he is ascended,

1. As our Great High Priest—

[The office of the High Priest was but half performed when he had slain the sacrifice: he must carry the blood within the veil, to sprinkle it upon the Mercy-seat; and he must burn incense also before the Mercy-seat. Now our blessed Lord was to execute every part of the priestly office; and therefore he must carry his own blood within the veil, and present also before the Mercy-seat the incense of his continual intercession. Agreeably to this we are told, "that by his own blood he is entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;" that "he is gone to appear in the presence of God for us;" and that "he ever liveth to make intercession for us[d]." What a blessed thought is this! Have I a doubt whether my sins shall be forgiven? Behold, he is at this very moment pleading in his Father's presence the merit of his blood, which is a sufficient "propitiation not for my sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Have I a doubt whether God will hear my unworthy petitions? Behold, Jesus, my Great High Priest, will secure, by his own prevailing intercession, an everlasting acceptance both of my person and services at the hands of Almighty God.]

2. As

[b] Ps. cx. 1. [c] John xiv. 28. [d] Heb. vii. 25. & ix. 12, 24.

2. As our living Head—

[Jesus is the Head and Representative of his people; insomuch that they may not improperly be said to be even at this time "sitting in and with him in heavenly places[dd]." But he is also our Head of vital influence, having all fulness of spiritual blessings treasured up in him, in order that we may receive out of it according to our necessities[e]. Adam at first had, as it were, a treasure of grace committed to his own custody; and he lost it even in Paradise. How much more then should we lose it, who are corrupt creatures in a corrupt world, if it were again left in our own keeping! But God has now taken more effectual care for us. He has given us into the hands of his own Son: and our life is now placed out of the reach of our great Adversary; "it is hid with Christ in God." Do we want wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification, or complete redemption? it is all treasured up for us in Christ, who "is made all unto us[f]." It is out of his inexhaustible fulness that we all receive[g]: and, as the sun in the firmament is the one source of all the light that we, or any other of the planets, receive, so is Christ of all the spiritual blessings that are enjoyed on earth: "He is head over all things to the Church;" and "he *filleth all in all*[h]."]

3. As the Forerunner of all his people—

[By that very name is he called, in reference to his entrance within the veil[i]. Indeed previous to his departure he expressly told his Disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them, in order at a future period to come and take them to himself, that they might be with him for ever[k]. He is gone up to heaven as the first-fruits, which sanctified and assured the whole harvest[l]. Soon is he coming again from thence, to take home his people who wait for him. Not one will he leave behind. At whatever period or place they died, they shall hear his voice, they shall "meet him in the air, they shall be ever with the Lord[m]." When he was upon earth he appeared like other men, and died laden with the iniquities of a ruined world: but in due time he will appear again, without sin, in all the glory of his Father and of his holy angels, to the complete and everlasting salvation of all who look for him[n]. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."]

IMPROVEMENT—

Is our blessed Lord ascended to the highest heavens? then,

1. Let

[dd] Eph. ii. 6. [e] Col. ii. 9. [f] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[g] John i. 16. [h] Eph. i. 22, 23. [i] Heb. vi. 19, 20.
[k] John xiv. 2, 3. [l] 1 Cor xv. 20.
[m] John v. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. [n] Heb. ix. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 18.

1. Let our affections be where He is—

[This is the improvement which St. Paul himself teaches us to make of this subject [o]——— What is there worth a thought in comparison of this adorable Saviour, who has died for us, and is yet every moment occupied in the great work of our salvation, exerting all his influence with the Father in our behalf, and communicating continually to our souls all needful supplies of grace and strength? ———]

2. Let our dependence be upon him—

[It may be said, that, having been quickened from the dead, we have now a new and spiritual life within us; but it must not be forgotten, that the life we have is not so committed to us, that we have it in, and of, ourselves: as light in our dwellings is derived from, and altogether dependent on, the sun in the firmament, so is the life that is infused into our souls entirely derived from, and dependent on, the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence St. Paul says, "I live: yet not I; but Christ liveth in me:" and then he adds, "And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me[p]." Thus it must be with us: we must remember that "all our fresh springs are in HIM:" and from him must we derive all our vital energy, as branches from the stock, and as members from the head. A life of faith on HIM is equally necessary for every human being: in ourselves we are all wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and to him must we equally be indebted for eye-salve to restore our sight, for raiment to cover us, and for gold to enrich our souls[q]. To him must we go for it from day to day; and from him must we obtain it, "without money and without price[r]."]

3. Let us be looking forward to, and preparing for, a similar entrance into his glory—

[St. Paul assures us, that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory[s]." Yes; as soon as ever the judgment shall be past, then shall he, at the head of his redeemed people, demand admission for them all into the highest heavens: "Lift up, &c. &c. and the King of glory, *with all his redeemed*, shall enter in." What shouts will then resound throughout all the courts of heaven! "The King of glory! The King of glory!" No other name will then be heard but that of our Redeeming God, to whom all possible "praise and honour and glory will be ascribed, even to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever." "Look then for this glorious period, and haste unto it," as the consummation

[o] Col. iii. 1, 2. with Phil. iii. 17, 20. [p] Gal. iii. 20.
[q] Rev. iii. 17, 18. [r] Isai. lv. 1. [s] Col. iii. 3, 4.

tion of all your hopes, and the completion of all your joys[t]: and by adding virtue to virtue, and grace to grace, ensure to yourselves an entrance, not like that of a mere wreck, but like a ship in full sail, even "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[u]."]

[t] 2 Pet. iii. 12. [u] 2 Pet. i. 5, 10, 11.

## CCCXLVI.

### PROPER METHOD OF PRAYING TO GOD.

Ps. xxv. 11. *For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity! for it is great.*

GOD is a mighty Sovereign, "who doth according to his own will," "neither giveth account to us of any of his matters." We may indeed mark the traces of wisdom and goodness in every thing which he does; but "his ways and his thoughts are very different from ours, and far above them." In the dispensations of his providence he pays no regard to the moral characters of men, but "makes the sun to shine equally upon the evil and the good." In the dispensations of his grace too he is far from preferring those whom we should think he would select. He often inclines the hearts of "publicans and harlots to enter into his kingdom," while he leaves less abandoned Pharisees and Formalists to perish in their sins. This, if it be an humiliating truth, is also replete with comfort. If it take away all grounds of boasting, it cuts off at the same time all occasion for despondency. If he "have a right to do what he will with his own," the vilest person in the universe may approach him with a comfortable hope of acceptance, and may address him in the language of the text.

In these words of the Psalmist we may notice,

I. His Confession—

David was not ashamed to confess that his sins were exceeding great—

[There is no reason to think that David in this psalm adverts to his transgression with Bathsheba. It is probable that the psalm was penned many years before that event. The Royal Penitent speaks rather of his in-dwelling corruptions. He had long been accustomed to observe the workings of his own heart,

heart, and had often besought God to search and try him to the uttermost[a]. In this way he had marked both the defects of his duties, and the evil propensities of his nature; and, from a review of all his actions, words, and thoughts, was led to acknowledge that his sin was exceeding great. Nor was this confession peculiar to him. Holy Job, as soon as he beheld his true character, exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile[b]!" And Paul no sooner became acquainted with the purity and extent of God's law, than he saw himself a condemned sinner, and confessed, that "in him dwelt no good thing[c]."]

And does not a similar confession become *us* also?

[Let us only review our past lives, and we shall find too much occasion for the deepest humiliation. Have not many of us been addicted to open, known iniquities? and do not the consciences of such persons testify against them that their sin is great? Have not many also devoted all their time and attention to *secular* concerns? and will they account it a light thing thus to despise God, and idolize the world? Have not others satisfied themselves with a formal round of duties, in which their souls were never earnestly engaged? and can they suppose that God is pleased with a mere lip-service, when their hearts are far from him? Have not others professed Godliness indeed, but walked utterly unworthy of their profession, being as proud, and passionate, as worldly too, and covetous, as those who have made no such profession? and can *they* suppose their sin is not great, when sinners are hardened, and God is blasphemed through their means? But why do we speak of the *profane* and *worldly*, or the *formal* and *hypocritical*? Must not even the *saints* themselves blush and be confounded, when they consider how miserably they have fallen short in every thing? Must they not exclaim with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am!"? Surely we must know little indeed of ourselves, if we do not all see how much the confession in the text is suited to our state.]

When, like David, we are duly humbled under a sense of our guilt, we shall readily adopt,

II. His Petition—

David could not rest without imploring forgiveness at God's hands—

[He found a sense of guilt to be an intolerable burthen to his soul[d]; and well knew that it would "eat as a canker," till he had obtained the pardon of his sin. Hence he humbled himself before his God, and cried for mercy.]

Nor

[a] Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.
[b] Job xl. 4.
[c] Rom. vii. 9, 18.
[d] Ps. xxxviii. 4.

Nor shall *we* restrain prayer before God, if we will but consider the state of an unpardoned soul—

[No words can fully express the misery of one who has all the guilt of his sins upon him. He has *no peace with God*, seeing that "God is angry with him every day," and "the wrath of God abideth on him." He has *no peace in his own conscience*; for though he may drown reflection for a while in business or pleasure, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casts up mire and dirt[e]. He is also *destitute of* any well-founded *hope*: he may buoy up himself with blind presumption; but he will feel many misgiving fears, and forebodings of evil. He has *no comfort in his afflictions*; for, not having God for his friend, he cannot go to him with confidence, or obtain those refreshing consolations which strengthen and uphold the godly. *In a dying hour* he is yet more *wretched*: if he be not insensible as a beast, how does he regret his mis-spent hours, and wish that God would prolong his state of probation! But *in the eternal world his misery is completed*: he comes to the tribunal of Justice without any Mediator to reconcile him to God, or any Advocate to plead his cause: yea, the very voice which just before importuned him to accept of mercy, now bids him "depart accursed:" and from that moment his doom is fixed in everlasting burnings. Now can any man reflect on this, and not see the need of crying earnestly for mercy? Can our petitions be too earnest, or too constant, when they are the appointed, and the only means of escaping all this misery?]

But in our application for mercy, we must be careful to use,

III. His Plea—

The Psalmist derived all his hope of mercy from God himself—

[He pleaded not the smallness of his offences or the multitude of his services, the depth of his penitence, or the fervour of his petitions. He knew that name, which had long before been proclaimed to Moses, to which, as to "a strong tower, the righteous runneth and is safe;" and to *that* he fled for refuge; from *that* he derived his only hope, his only plea.]

Nor can we present any other plea than the name, the sacred name of Jesus—

[Under the Gospel we are taught more clearly to ask in the name of Jesus, and are assured that petitions so offered shall never fail of acceptance[f]. But it is no easy matter to offer that plea in sincerity. Perhaps there is not any thing in the

[e] Isai. lvii. 20. [f] John xiv. 13, 14.

the world more difficult. *We naturally prefer any other plea that can be devised:* and, even when we find that we have not in ourselves any worthiness on which we can rely, we are still averse to rest on the name of Jesus. We either *deem it insufficient* to procure acceptance for our prayers, or *make our unworthiness a reason for declining to urge it as our plea* with any confidence before God. But, unless we renounce every other hope, and rest entirely on the mediation and intercession of Christ, our prayer will never enter into the ears of our heavenly Father—]

OBSERVATIONS:

1. The vilest of sinners has no reason to despair—

[The confession, petition, and plea, which David presented at the throne of Grace, are suited to the very chief of sinners: nor, as the subsequent experience of David proves, can there be any state in which they shall not prevail. Let none then despond. Be it so, Our iniquities are great; but are they greater than Christ's merits, or beyond the reach of God's mercy? If not, let us exalt our adorable Saviour, and determine, if we perish, to perish crying for mercy in the name of Jesus.]

2. The most eminent saints have no ground to boast—

[There never was a creature that had any righteousness of his own to plead. And if God has had mercy upon any, it was purely and entirely for his own name sake[g]. Could we ascend to heaven, and ask the glorified saints what had been the ground of their acceptance, they would all "cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus," and shout, with one consent, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb[h]!"—Let the saints on earth then lie low before God, and say continually, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy *name* be the praise."]

3. Persons of every description must guard diligently against pride and unbelief—

[Sin, of whatever kind, is both evil in itself and dangerous to us. But the consequences of pride and unbelief are peculiarly fatal. There is not any other sin which may not be forgiven, provided we seek mercy with real penitence and faith. But if we be too proud to confess our sins, and to plead the name and merits of Jesus for the forgiveness of them, we insure and seal our own condemnation. Let us then guard against *all* sin; but especially against these, which rivet all our other sins upon us. So shall we obtain favour with God, and "be to him for a name and for a praise for evermore[i]."]

[g] Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32. [h] Rev. iv. 10. & vii. 10. [i] Jer. xiii. 11.

## CCCXLVII.

### DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD'S ORDINANCES.

Ps. xxvii. 4. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his Temple.*

MOST of the saints recorded in the holy Scriptures were eminent for some particular grace. In Abraham, faith was chiefly conspicuous; in Job, patience; in Moses, meekness; in Elijah, faithfulness and intrepidity. In respect of devotion, David seems to have surpassed all others. Of none have we such ample and minute accounts, in relation to this matter, as we have of him. His public addresses to the Deity, his private communion with him, the inmost recesses of his heart when in his closet or upon his bed, are all laid open to us. On this account the Psalms are pre-eminently useful to all who wish to cultivate a devout spirit, and to maintain a close walk with God. The expression before us may serve as a specimen of the whole. In discoursing upon it, I will,

I. Set before you the example of David—

The one object of his desire was to enjoy the ordinances of his God—

[David was not of the tribe to which the priesthood exclusively belonged: yet would he gladly have possessed the privilege of the Priests, in having his stated residence as near as possible to the tabernacle of his God. But though this could not be, he determined, by the constancy of his attendance there, to make it, as it were, his residence and habitation. This indeed was "the one object of his desire:" and in comparison of it there was nothing in the world that he wished for. To this he made every thing subservient: even the affairs of State were not suffered so to occupy his mind as to divert his attention from the service of the Sanctuary. This one object he sought, and "determined to seek it" "to the latest hour of his life." He "sought it of the Lord" too, intreating him so to order and overrule every thing, that he might not be forced away from Jerusalem, or, whilst there, be kept away from the ordinances of his God. If at any time he was, by the efforts of his enemies, prevented from waiting upon God, he mourned over it, and "panted

"panted after the return of those blessed seasons even as the hunted deer panteth after the water-brooks[a]." On some occasions, his enemies, knowing how painful to him his absence from the tabernacle was, exulted over him, and said, "Where is now thy God!" And so distressing to him were these impious taunts, that "tears were his meat night and day on account of them[b]," and they were even "as a sword in his bones[c]." At those seasons he envied the swallows, that were able to build their nests in the courts of God's House: he envied them, I say, their proximity to the altar of his God[d]. Every day that was spent at a distance from that, seemed, as it were, to be lost to his life; so entirely was his soul wrapped up in the enjoyment of Divine ordinances, and in cultivating communion with his God.]

And this desire was founded on the benefit he had derived from them—

[There "he beheld the beauty of the Lord;" and there "he inquired of the Lord," spreading before him, from day to day, his every want, his every wish. He looked through the various sacrifices that were offered there from day to day, and beheld in them the perfections of his God. In the death of all the victims he saw the desert of sin, and *the justice* of God, which had denounced death as the punishment of sin. In the acceptance of those sacrifices he saw *the goodness and mercy* of God, who had appointed such offerings as means of leading the people to that Great Sacrifice, which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world. In the sprinklings and ablutions that were practised, he beheld *the holiness* of God, who would accept no sinner who should not be purged from his iniquities, and be made holy after the Divine image. In the whole of the services altogether he saw "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other[e]."

Here he felt encouragement to pour out his soul before God, and to ask whatsoever his returning necessities might require. This, to him whose trials were so great and manifold, was an unspeakable privilege. The extreme arduousness of his affairs also rendered it most desirable to him to spread all his difficulties before the Lord, and to ask counsel of him for his direction. True it was, that in private he could carry his affairs to the Lord, and implore help from him: but, as the public ordinances were of God's special appointment, and as the High Priest was the established medium of access to him, and of communications from him, he delighted more particularly to wait upon God there; that so, whilst he received blessings in a more abundant measure from God, he might glorify God in the sight of all Israel.]

Admiring,

[a] Ps. xlii. 1, 2. [b] ib. ver. 3. [c] ib. ver. 10.
[d] Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4. [e] Ps. lxxxv. 10.

Admiring, as I do, this bright example, I beg leave to,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

We have far greater reason to love the House of God than ever David had—

[If the beauty of the Lord was visible in the Jewish worship, how much more so must it be in the ordinances of the Gospel! David beheld the perfections of his God only under types and shadows: but we behold them reflected as in a glass or mirrour, with transcendent brightness, and all shining with united splendor in the face of Jesus Christ. We see, not bulls and goats, but the very Son of God himself, "Jehovah's fellow," offered in sacrifice for the sins of men. What then must *the justice* be that required SUCH a sacrifice! What *the love*, that gave HIM from the Father's bosom to be a sacrifice! What *the mercy*, that spared not HIM, in order that WE, enemies and rebels, might be spared! So imperfectly was this mystery known under the Jewish dispensation, that all, even the most exalted Prophets, were in a state of comparative darkness: but now, "the things which from the beginning of the world eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had it entered into the heart of man to conceive, are revealed unto us by the Spirit[f];" so that we can truly and emphatically say, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth[g]." John the Baptist was greater in this respect than all the Prophets; because he personally saw and bare witness to Him, whom all the other Prophets spoke of obscurely, and at the distance of many hundred years: but, great as John was, "the least and lowest in the Gospel kingdom is greater than he[h]." In our ordinances, Jesus Christ is so fully revealed, that he may be said to be "evidently set forth crucified before our eyes[i];" and at his holy table we "eat his flesh, and drink his blood," as truly in a spiritual sense, as we do really and substantially eat the bread and drink the wine by which they are represented. We see that through the virtue of this sacrifice God is so reconciled to us, as to "behold no iniquity in us[k]:" for, viewing us as clothed in the righteousness of his dear Son, he beholds us "without spot or blemish[l]." Moreover as by faith we see the Lord Jesus carrying his own blood within the veil, so we also *hear* him making intercession for us at the right hand of God: yea, and, "out of the fulness that is treasured up in him we receive" all the blessings that he has purchased for us. How often are we, in the experience of these things, constrained to cry out with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great

[f] 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.
[g] 1 John ii. 8.
[h] Matt. xi. 11.
[i] Gal. iii. 1.
[k] Numb. xxiii. 21.
[l] Eph. v. 27.

great is his beauty[m]!" And how often, in rapturous admiration of him, do we pray with the Psalmist, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!" In truth, it is by thus "beholding as with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord[n]."

Nor have we less the advantage of David in relation to the things which we would ask of God: for we are able to inquire more explicitly and distinctly of our God than he could. He indeed might say with Moses, "Lord, shew me thy glory:" and God would, as in the case of Moses, "make all his goodness to pass before him[o]." But audible sounds conveyed nothing to them in comparison of what shall be disclosed to us by the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit, speaking in us through the written word. To us all the blessings of the Covenant are laid open: and, as God, when he revealed them, said, "I will be inquired of concerning these things to do them[p]," we are at liberty to take that covenant, and spread it before the Lord, and to ask of him every distinct blessing that is contained in it. We may lay hold on every promise that we can find in the Inspired Volume, and plead it with God, and have it fulfilled to our souls——Besides, *we can ask in the name of Jesus Christ;* which none of the Prophets ever could. And with what confidence can we do that, when we reflect on the relation which subsists between the Father and the Son, and the express engagement which the Father has made to answer every petition which is offered in his Son's name[q]!——Moreover, the particular promise of the Lord Jesus to be more immediately with his people in the public ordinances, and to grant whatever any number of his congregated people shall agree to ask[r], is a still further encouragement to us to frequent the House of God: for experience proves, that still, as formerly, "God loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob[s]."]

We should therefore desire it no less than David did—

[We should make a point of attending on all stated occasions the ordinances of our God. We should not suffer any trifling matter to detain us from them: and, if we are kept from them by any means, it should fill us with grief rather than complacency: and we should determine as soon as possible to remove the obstacle that deprives us of so great a blessing.

More particularly, we should keep in mind what it is that we should go thither to obtain; nor ever consider the true object of the ordinances as attained, unless we be enriched with brighter views

[m] Zech. ix. 17. [n] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [o] Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.
[p] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [q] John xvi. 23, 24.
[r] Matt. xviii. 19, 20. [s] Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

views of his beauty, and more enlarged discoveries of his excellency — — — We should consider too, what our more immediate necessities require; so that we may be ready to spread them all before him, and to inquire of him respecting them — — — Then the more enlarged our expectations of benefit from the ordinances are, the more abundant will be God's communications of blessings to us by them. If we "open our mouths ever so wide, he will fill them[t]."]

To this I would URGE you, from the consideration, that such love to God's ordinances is,

1. Most conducive to your present happiness—

[Hear the testimony of David himself: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: he shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy House, even of thy holy Temple[u]." And with this agrees the experience of every living saint. Hence every true Believer can say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy House, and *the place where thine honour dwelleth*[x]: or rather, the more appropriate language of his heart is, "O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary[y]." I will leave you to judge, whether a person with such desires, and such enjoyments, be not happy. And if you are persuaded that he must be so, then seek your own happiness in this way, in which you cannot possibly be disappointed: for "he never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

2. The best preparative for heaven—

[Heaven is a place of continued occupation; of exercises for which we are now to be trained. We must now obtain a taste for heavenly employments; and *in that taste real piety consists*. We quite mistake if we imagine that religion consists in *notions* or in *forms*: it is a *taste*; a taste not formed by nature or education; but wrought in us by the Spirit of God: and the acquisition of this constitutes our meetness for heaven. What happiness could a soul that feels the exercises of devotion irksome, find in heaven; where the singing praises to God and to the Lamb forms the one employment of all around the throne, and will to all eternity? If this be not the pleasure which you chiefly affect in this world, be assured that you are not prepared to unite with saints and angels in the world to come. If this be not your state, whatever knowledge you may possess, you are yet carnal: for God himself has said, that "they who are after the flesh do *mind* (*savour*) the things of the flesh; and they who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit[z]." I pray you then to

[t] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [u] Ps. lxv. 4. [x] Ps. xxvi. 8.
[y] Ps. lxiii. 1, 2, 4, 5. [z] Rom. viii. 5. φρονοῦσιν.

to seek your happiness in God; and never to rest, till you can say of him, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee."]*

* If this be a subject at *the Opening of a Church or Chapel*, the great need that there was of a place of worship may be stated, and a hope expressed, that it may be the means of preparing many for the Church above.

## CCCXLVIII.

### ADORING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. xxviii. 7. *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him.*

THE man of this world delights to speak of the things of this world: the man of God delights to speak of God: each speaketh out of the abundance of his own heart. It is the very character of a true Believer, that "he regards the works of the Lord and the operation of his hands," and that he desires to magnify the Lord for all the benefits conferred upon him. No one can read the Psalms of David, without being penetrated with this thought. What the particular affliction was from which he had recently been delivered when he penned this psalm, we do not certainly know: but after blessing God for his condescension and grace in hearing and answering his supplications, he records, for the benefit of all future saints, his feelings in the review of the mercies vouchsafed unto him.

In this record we see,

I. What God is to the Believer—

To all that trust in him, he is both a protector from all evil, and a helper to all good—

This is a blessed truth, if considered only *in theory*—

[What cannot he do that "has the God of Jacob for his help?" To what duty may he not address himself with a full assurance that he shall be able to fulfil it? Would he overcome the most inveterate lusts? "Through the influence of God's Spirit he shall mortify the deeds of the body," and "bring the very

very thoughts of his heart into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Would he attain and exercise all the graces of the Spirit? he shall do so, yea, "he shall do all things through Christ strengthening him"———

And whom needs he to fear? Surely neither men nor devils: for, what can man do, when he himself is crushed before the worm? As for Satan, though he have at his command all the principalities and powers of hell, he is a vanquished enemy, and shall ere long "be bruised for ever under the Believer's feet"———]

But this truth is yet more blessed, when it is *practically experienced* by the Believer in his own soul—

[What a zest does the Believer's own experience give to every declaration of the Inspired Volume! When, from the communications he has actually received, he can say, God is *my* strength and *my* shield, then it is that he is prepared to enjoy these blessed truths as he ought, and to give unto God the glory due unto his name. And here we cannot but exhort every Believer to trust in God with his whole heart. In this case he shall never be disappointed of his hope: yea rather, the more he expects, the more he shall receive; and according to his faith it shall be done unto him. Let him only be able to say with David, "My heart trusted in him," and he shall sooner or later have reason to add, "I *am* helped:" I *am* protected from evils, which I could not by my own wisdom or power avoid; and I *am* enabled to do things, for which my own strength would have been utterly insufficient: by my own experience therefore, no less than from the divine testimony, I can say, "The Lord is *my* strength, and *my* shield."]

As from David's assertions we learn what God is to us, so from his frame of mind we may see,

II. What should be the disposition of our hearts towards him—

Certainly these exalted privileges should be received by us,

1. With joy—

[Who can have reason to rejoice in comparison of the Believer? Look round and see how the world at large are taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will. Have you no reason to rejoice when God has interposed with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm to deliver you? When you see the dangers with which you are surrounded, have you no reason to rejoice in having such a shield as is sufficiently large to encompass

pass you on every side, and so strong as to be impenetrable to all the fiery darts of the devil? When you see what lusts you have to mortify, and what duties to perform, have you not reason to rejoice in having Omnipotence for your strength? O rejoice; rejoice in the Lord always; yea, "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." However "greatly your heart rejoiceth," you never need be afraid of excess: let it but be the joy of a dependent Being, and it cannot be too great.]

2. With thankfulness—

[It is your privilege to "sing in the ways of the Lord." In heaven the Redeemed are singing praises to their God day and night: and so should you do on earth. As for David, he would "praise God day and night;" and that too with "all that was within him;" yea, and "as long as he should live." Not content with praising God himself, he would have the sun, moon, and stars, together with every thing that had life and breath, to praise him too[a]. This is a state of mind worthy of a redeemed sinner; nor should we ever rest till we have attained it.]

We shall conclude this subject with two INQUIRIES—

1. Whence is it that so few possess this heavenly frame?

[It must be confessed, that amongst the professors of religion, there are but few comparatively in whom Christianity has its perfect work. Some are retarded in their growth by "the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things, and never bring forth fruit unto perfection." Others are remiss in the duties of the closet, and thereby deprive themselves of those rich communications of grace and peace, which God would otherwise bestow upon them. And others again are always poring over the evils of their own hearts, instead of contemplating the mercies of their God, and the wonders of Redeeming Love. It is not at all surprising that these different characters enjoy but little of that divine unction which is imparted to those only who live in close communion with their God. But let no man impute their want of joy to any defect in Christianity itself: they are not straitened in their God any more than David was: it is in themselves that they are straitened; and "they receive not, because they ask not." Let them only live nigh unto God in the exercise of prayer and faith, and they shall find that God is the same in every age, rich in mercy, and "abundant in goodness and truth."

2. How may we all attain it?

[We have advantages far beyond any that David ever enjoyed.

[a] Ps. cxlv. 1—7. & cxlviii. 1—14.

joyed. What he saw under a veil, we behold, as it were, with open face; A God incarnate, taking upon himself the entire care of all his people, standing between them and the curse of the broken law, and engaging to keep them by his own power unto everlasting salvation. For *us* there is "help laid upon One that is mighty:" for *us* there is all fulness treasured up in Christ, so that we are privileged to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[b]" ——— Let us then improve this privilege as we ought to do: let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," yea, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Then may we be assured of final victory, and now, even in the midst of all our conflicts, exult as already victors, yea, as "more than conquerors through Him that loved us[c]."]

[b] Isai. xlv. 24. See especially Isai. xxv. 4.
[c] Rom. viii. 34—39. or Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

## CCCXLIX.

### CAUSE AND CURE OF SPIRITUAL DESERTION.

Ps. xxx. 6—12. *In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved: Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication: What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me! Lord, be thou my helper! Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise unto thee, and not be silent: O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.*

AMONGST all the friends of vital godliness it is supposed that Christian experience is well understood: but it is a lamentable truth, that those in general who think themselves best acquainted with it, are exceedingly mistaken with respect to some of its most important parts. The distinctive offices of faith and unbelief, of confidence and fear, are by no means clearly defined in the minds either of Ministers or people: on the contrary, they are often so confounded as to produce very serious evils; for by the misconceptions respecting them many are instructed to shun what God approves, and to cultivate what

what he abhors. For instance; A persuasion that we are God's elect people, and that we are in no danger of perishing, is recommended by many as the root and summit of Christian faith; whilst a fear lest we should have deceived ourselves, or should ultimately perish, is characterized as an evil heart of unbelief: and thus, a godly jealousy over ourselves is discouraged as a sin, and an unfounded confidence respecting our state is encouraged as a virtue. These mistakes arise partly from a blind following of human authorities, and partly from being confined by the trammels of human systems. To have just views on these subjects is of great importance both for Ministers and people; for Ministers, that they may know how to discriminate between good and evil in their flocks; and to the people, that they may form such an estimate of themselves as God himself forms of them.

The psalm before us will afford us an occasion for marking the distinctions which we conceive to be so eminently useful, and yet so generally wanted. It is said in the title to have been written at the dedication of David's house: but we apprehend it was rather at the second dedication of it, after it had been shamefully defiled by Absalom. To this period of time, rather than to any other, we are directed by many parts of the psalm. It should seem that about that time the prosperity of David had lulled him into a state of undue security; and that God sent him this affliction to rouse him from it. The successive frames of his mind are here clearly marked; and must successively be considered as they are here presented to our view:

I. His carnal security—

[There being to all appearance perfect tranquillity in his kingdom, David conceived that no evil could arise to disturb his repose: and it seems that a similar confidence was also indulged by him in reference to his spiritual enemies. This is indeed the common effect of long-continued prosperity: but it is a state of mind highly displeasing to God. We are dependent creatures; and ought at all times to feel, that whatever we have, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, is but lent to us from hour to hour.

hour, according to the good pleasure of Him, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." The very continuance of our lives should be regarded in this view; so that we should never think of what we will do in the next year, or even on the morrow, without an express reference to God as the sovereign controller of all events[a]. Job himself erred exceedingly in this respect, when he said, "I shall die in my nest[b]." The same sense of dependence on God must more especially be maintained in reference to our spiritual life. The very chief of the Apostles, no less than we, needed to preserve upon his mind a consciousness, that, without incessant vigilance and care, he might, "after having preached to others, himself become a cast-away." However confident any man may be that he stands firm, it becomes him to "take heed lest he fall[c]." And so far is this frame of mind from being, as religious people are apt to fancy it, an effect of legality and unbelief, it is pronounced by God himself as most pleasing to him, and beneficial to us; for "blessed is the man that feareth always[d]."

It is worthy of observation, that David *ostensibly* acknowledged God as the author of his security; "Thou by thy favour hast made my mountain to stand strong:" but it is evident that his confidence was not really in God, so much as in his situation and circumstances, which had to all appearance a stability on which he might rely. And thus it is with those amongst ourselves who have fallen into a state of carnal security: they *profess* to depend on God; but their want of holy fear demonstrates, that their confidence is in something which they themselves possess, and which they consider as affording a just ground for the dismission of vigilance and jealous apprehension.

David's relaxation of this salutary fear was followed by]

## II. His spiritual dereliction—

[To punish this undue security, God withdrew from David in some measure the protection of his providence, and the comforts of his grace: he suffered Absalom to carry into effect his traitorous conspiracy against him; and he left David without those heavenly consolations which under former trials he had been wont to experience: "Thou didst hide thy face from me," says David, "and I was troubled." Now such rebukes must be expected by all who forget their dependence upon God. "Verily he is a God that hideth himself;" and by the dispensations of his providence and grace he marks his indignation against the backslidings of his people. We doubt not but that his withdrawment of many temporal blessings from us is a punishment of our idolatrous attachment to them, and dependence upon them. It was for this that he sent a worm to destroy Jonah's gourd;

[a] Jam. iv. 13—15. [b] Job xxix. 18.
[c] 1 Cor. x. 12. [d] Prov. xxviii. 14.

gourd; and for this he required the soul of him who thought "he had much goods laid up for many years." We doubt not also but that the experience of every child of God will more or less attest the same in reference to the withdrawment of his presence from them. In proportion as any have become less vigilant, they lose those manifestations of the Divine presence which in the seasons of holy fear they were privileged to enjoy. Nor is it a mere privation of joy which they experience on such occasions; there is a perturbation of mind arising from a sense of the Divine displeasure, and a painful apprehension lest they should never be restored to the favour of their God. David's "trouble," as arising from this source, was of a very overwhelming nature[e]: and woe be to those who wantonly provoke God to inflict it on them[f].

In what way he sought deliverance from this trouble, we see by,]

III. His fervent prayers—

["He cried unto the Lord, and (as it is in the Prayer-book translation) gat him to his Lord right humbly." How he pleaded with God, may be seen in our text; and in this he affords an excellent pattern for us under similar circumstances. His plea is to this effect; "Lord, withdraw not thyself from me for ever: it is through thy help alone that I can ever recover the state from which I am fallen; and without such a recovery I can never bring any glory to thy name. O leave me not in the wretched state into which I am fallen."]

Now here we see the true, the only, remedy for a soul that has provoked God to depart from it. To have recourse to the doctrines of election and final perseverance under such circumstances, is the way to foster that very disease which God is seeking by this discipline to cure. We say not that we are to keep out of sight the promises of God; for beyond a doubt we are to make use of them at all times and on all occasions: but then we are to make use of them, *not for the fostering of an unhumbled confidence in God, but for the encouraging of our humiliation before God.* We are to be constantly on our guard "not to heal our wounds slightly, or to cry, Peace, peace, when there is no peace." We should bear in mind that the humbling of our souls is the very end which God aims at in withdrawing his presence from us: and the more we answer this end, the better; nay, if by the suspension of his favour towards us we be brought to a more earnest crying after him, and to an utter abhorrence of ourselves in dust and ashes, we shall have as much reason to adore him for such discipline, as for the most exalted joys he ever afforded us.

This also is a point which we conceive to be of exceeding great

[e] Ps. lxxvii. 2—4. [f] Deut. xxxii. 20.

great importance for the due regulation of our own minds, and for the right counselling of those who are under the hidings of God's face.

The excellency and efficacy of this remedy may be seen in,]

## IV. His speedy recovery—

[Many there are who go mourning almost all their lives. And wherefore? Is it that God arbitrarily, and without occasion, hides his face from them? No: it is owing to this very thing which we have been speaking of, namely, their restraining of prayer before God, and not using the proper means of regaining his favour. Indeed many are brought into absolute despair by the very means which they use to remove their apprehensions: they go to the consideration of God's secret decrees, when they should be mourning over their miscarriages, and imploring pardon for Christ's sake. Hence they are led to argue thus: "If an elect vessel, how could I be in such darkness and distress? But I am in this darkness, therefore God has not elected me; and there is no hope for me." But behold the effect of humiliation and contrition! See how speedily God returned to the soul of his servant, in answer to his fervent supplications! The prayers were scarcely offered, before David was enabled to say, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." And thus would it be with all of us, if we would pursue the method which this holy man adopted. "God delighteth in the prosperity of his servants:" and, as a parent feels relief to his own soul when he can return in love to his offending child, so does God, when he can again lift up the light of his countenance on those, from whom he has been constrained for a season to withhold it[g]. The father's reception of his prodigal son is a sure and delightful specimen of the favour which all will experience, as soon as ever they are brought to the footstool of Divine grace with cries for mercy in the all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ. The testimony of David in this very psalm shall be confirmed in you: "His anger endureth but a moment: in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning[h]."

The speedy restoration of God's favour to him immediately drew forth,]

## V. His grateful acknowledgments—

[To bring him back to a state of holy peace and joy was the very end for which God so graciously renewed to him the expressions of his love: it was, says David, "to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent." He calls his tongue "his glory," because that is the member by which above all he could glorify his God: and he determines instantly to

[g] See Jer. xiii. 27. & Ps. lxxxi. 13—16. [h] ver. 5.

to employ it in his praise: "O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." Blessed resolution! O that every one of us would instantly adopt it! O that God would inspire us with grace sufficient to carry it into execution! It is in order to bring all to this, that we have been so particular in the foregoing statement. It is with a view to this that we so earnestly recommend humiliation before God under seasons of darkness, rather than an attention to abstract points, which tend only to foster a delusion. Humility, and contrition, and a believing application of the blood of Christ to our souls, can never deceive us; but, on the contrary, must infallibly lead to songs of praise and thanksgiving: "if we sow in tears, we must reap in joy." Only observe the process, and see how connected are all the links of the chain: in prosperity, we have relapsed into *carnal confidence*, and provoked God to leave us in a state of *spiritual dereliction:* alarmed and humbled by his frowns, we betake ourselves to *fervent prayer*, imploring mercy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and through the unbounded grace of God we experience a *speedy recovery;* and from thenceforth have our mouths filled with *grateful acknowledgments* to the God of our salvation. We only add to this, that the deeper is our humiliation on account of sin committed, the more speedy and exalted will be our joys on account of deliverance vouchsafed.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who are walking with God—

[What shall we say? Even if you were as eminent as ever David was, we should think it right to guard you against the conceit, that you were in no danger of being "moved." In relation to all that you possess of temporal things, we would inculcate this salutary lesson, "Let those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who weep be as though they wept not, and those that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and those who buy as though they possessed not, and those that use this world, as not abusing it." Every thing must be held as from God, and for God, to be disposed of according to his sovereign will and pleasure. And in reference to every thing of a spiritual nature, we would recommend a constant sense of our entire dependence upon God, saying "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Some will confound this with unbelief; but it differs from unbelief as much as humility from pride: in truth, it is the very root of faith; for it is only in proportion as we feel our liability to fall, that we shall look truly and constantly to Christ for strength. Be weak as new-born infants in yourselves, and God will keep beneath you his everlasting arms, and perfect "his own strength in your weakness."]

2. To

2. To those who have declined from him—

[Many in a state of declension are ready to imagine that God has arbitrarily and without any particular cause withdrawn himself from them. But it may well be doubted whether in any case God ever dealt thus with any of his creatures. Our blessed Lord, when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was suffering the punishment due to those whose iniquities had been laid on him. And Job, whose expression, "I shall die in my nest," we have before noticed, had evidently a measure of carnal confidence which wanted to be mortified and subdued. With the exception of his case we are not aware of any thing that bears even the appearance of arbitrary proceeding on the part of God: the constant tenor of his acting is that which was proclaimed to Asa, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him: if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you[i]." Learn then to trace your sin in your punishment: and, if you cannot find the immediate cause of his withdrawment from you, pray to him, with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." The prayer which David offered under such circumstances, (See Psalm cxliii. 1—8.) will assuredly, if offered up in faith, bring down upon you the blessings of peace and joy. This God himself has promised[k]——— and you may be as fully assured of its accomplishment to your soul, as the promise and oath of God can make you[l]— — —].

[i] 2 Chron. xv. 2. [k] Isai. lvii. 16—18.
[l] Isai. liv. 7—10. with Heb. vi. 17, 18.

## CCCL.

### OUR TIMES IN GOD'S HAND.

Ps. xxxi. 15. *My times are in thy hand.*

TO the ungodly it is a satisfaction to deny the providence of God, and to cut him off, as it were, from any connection with his creatures. But the saints find a rich consolation in the thought that God reigneth. This it is which reconciles them to the evils they endure, and fortifies them against those which they have reason to apprehend. David, in the psalm before us, complains that there were many who "took counsel together against him, and devised to take away his life." But he comforted himself in the reflection, that, however *man* might be his enemy, *God* was "his God;" and that however bitterly his enemies

enemies might be enraged against him, "his times were not in *their* hands, but in *God's*;" and, consequently, that they could do nothing against him but by his permission.

From this view of the text we are led to notice,

I. Our dependence on God—

God is the Governor of the universe: he appoints the stars their courses; he makes the raging elements to fulfil his will[a]; he imposes a restraint upon the most savage beasts, causing them to suppress[b] or forget[c] their instinctive ferocity, or over-ruling the exercise of it, for the preservation[d] or destruction of men[e], as he sees occasion. The affairs of men he more especially controuls. In his hands are,

1. The occurrences of life—

[There is nothing really casual or contingent in the world. It is God that disposes of us from our earliest infancy to the latest hour of our lives. "He determines the bounds of our habitation[f]." If we are called to the possession of wealth, or deprived of it by any untoward circumstances, it is "the Lord who gives, and the Lord who taketh it away[g]." If we enjoy health, or pine away in sickness, it is "the Lord who both wounds and heals, who kills and makes alive[h]." "There is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord is the doer of it[i]." Even the falling of a hair of our head, trifling as it is, takes not place but by his appointment[k].]

2. The seasons of death—

[To every man "there is an appointed time upon earth[l]: there are "bounds which he cannot pass[m]." "God holdeth our souls in life[n]:" and "when he taketh away our breath, we die, and return to the dust[o]." Youth and health are no security against the stroke of death: the most vigorous constitutions are soon broken, when God is pleased to afflict us[p]: the skill of physicians, however useful when attended with his blessing, is of no avail[q]. So numerous are the occasions of death, that no caution can possibly avoid them: "a man may flee from a lion, and a bear meet him; or he may go into a house for safety, and a serpent bite him[r]." When God "requires our souls," we must surrender

[a] Ps. cxlviii. 8.
[b] 1 Kin. xiii. 28.
[c] Dan. vi. 22.
[d] Jon. i. 17.
[e] 2 Kin. ii. 24.
[f] Acts xvii. 26.
[g] Job i. 21.
[h] 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7.
[i] Am. iii. 6.
[k] Matt. x. 30.
[l] Job vii. 1.
[m] Job xiv. 5.
[n] Ps. lxvi. 9.
[o] Ps. civ. 29.
[p] Job xxi. 23—25.
[q] Mark v. 26.
[r] Amos v. 19.

surrender them at his call[s]." Our days are protracted to an advanced age, if he be pleased to uphold us; if not, our course is finished as soon as ever it is commenced. It is "in God, and in God alone, that we live, and move, and have our being[t]."]

But though these ideas are certainly comprehended in the text, its more immediate scope is to declare,

II. Our security in God—

We have already observed, that the words of the text were introduced by David as a consolatory reflection, under the cruel treatment which he had received from friends and enemies. We are therefore taught by them to assure ourselves,

1. That none can destroy us before our time—

[We appear to be, yea, we really are, in the midst of many and great dangers. But however we may be encompassed with enemies, they cannot prevail against us till the Lord's time for our removal is come. David was continually exposed to the rage and jealousy of Saul, who repeatedly cast a javelin at him, and hunted him incessantly with armed hosts "like a partridge upon the mountains." Yet though he was often in the most imminent danger[u], and certainly would have been betrayed by the men of Keilah[x], yet God watched over him, and kept him in perfect safety. Many sought to apprehend our Lord; but "they could not lay hands on him till his hour was come[y]:" and even then Pilate "could have had no power against him, unless it had been given him from above[z]." Paul was in perils innumerable, "and in deaths oft[a]:" once he was stoned, and even left for dead[b]; but none could take away his life, till he had finished the course marked out for him. Thus we also are immortal, till our work is done. We are surrounded with "chariots of fire and horses of fire[c]:" yea, "God himself is a wall of fire round about us[d]." And sooner shall successive bands of enemies be struck dead upon the spot by fire from heaven[e], than one of the Lord's little ones shall perish[f]."]

2. That none shall hurt us without his permission—

[As we depend on God for our happiness as well as for our existence, so are both our being and our well-being secured by him. Satan could not touch the person or the property of Job, till he had obtained leave of God to do so[g]. "Nor can any weapon

[s] Luke xii. 20. [t] Acts xvii. 28. [u] 1 Sam. xxiii. 26.
[x] ib. ver. 11, 12. [y] John vii. 30. & viii. 20. Luke xiii. 33.
[z] John xix. 11. [a] 2 Cor. xi. 23—27. [b] Acts xiv. 19, 20.
[c] 2 Kin. vi. 17. [d] Zech. ii. 5. [e] 2 Kin. i. 10—12.
[f] Matt. xviii. 14. [g] Job i. 12. & ii. 6.

weapon that is formed against us, prosper[h]," any further than our God shall see good to permit it. "His angels encamp round about us[i]," and have an especial charge to "keep us in all our ways, that we dash not our foot against a stone[k]." "Neither the arrow that flieth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, can hurt us. Thousands may fall at our side, and ten thousands at our right hand; but it shall not come nigh us[l]."

We are not indeed at liberty to rush needlessly into danger, from an expectation that God will deliver us; (this were to "tempt the Lord our God[m];") but in the path of duty we have nothing to fear: we may "tread upon the lion, the adder, or the dragon[n];" we may drink poison itself[o], or suffer ourselves to be committed to the flames, without experiencing the smallest injury[p]: nothing in the whole universe can "harm us, if we be followers of that which is good[q]:" if God see fit to keep us, we are as safe "in a den of lions" as in a house of friends.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. To seek God without delay—

[There is no period of life when we can call one day, or one hour, our own. We are altogether "in God's hands;" and, if he withdraw his support for one moment, we perish, as certainly as a stone gravitates to the earth. Shall we then, when so entirely dependent on our God, provoke him to cast us out of his hands? Shall we continue to despise his patience and forbearance, till he swear in his wrath that our "time shall be no longer[r]?" Think, how many have lost the time afforded them, and how bitterly they now bewail their folly: and beg of God, that he would[s] "so teach you to number your days, that you may apply your hearts unto wisdom[s]."]

2. To serve him without fear—

[We are too apt to keep back from serving God through fear of the persecutions we may endure from man. But, if our times be in God's hands, all our concerns must be there too; and nothing can befall us but by his appointment. "Who art thou then, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker[t]?" Are we not told, that "the wrath of man shall praise him; and that the remainder of it he shall restrain[u]?" Be bold then for God; "set your face as a flint against the whole world[x]," and trust in him for protection. He will not indeed screen you from all trials; because it is on many accounts necessary that you should feel them[y]: but he

[h] Isai. liv. 17. [i] Ps. xxxiv. 7. [k] Ps. xci. 11, 12.
[l] ib. ver. 5—7. [m] Matt. iv. 6, 7.
[n] Ps. xci. 13. Acts xxviii. 3—6. [o] Mark xvi. 18.
[p] Dan. iii. 25—27. [q] 1 Pet. iii. 13. [r] Rev. x. 6.
[s] Ps. xc. 12. [t] Isai. li. 12, 13. [u] Ps. lxxvi. 10.
[x] Isai. xlix. 7—9. [y] 1 Pet. i. 6.

he will suffer none to come upon you which he will not enable you to bear, none which he will not sanctify to your eternal good[z].

3. To trust him without carefulness—

[It is foolish as well as impious to distrust God, or to murmur at any of his dispensations. In whose hands could the disposal of all events be placed so much to our advantage, as in his, who possesses infinite wisdom to devise what is best, and infinite power to effect it? Would we be made the sport of chance or fortune? or would we have our present and everlasting concerns left wholly to our own management? If we are not fit to regulate our temporal affairs till we attain the age of manhood, how much less can we ever be competent to take the reins of God's government into our own hands, and to order the affairs of his kingdom. But our times will be in God's hands, whether we acquiesce in it or not. Let us therefore contentedly leave ourselves to his all-wise disposal, assured, that "he doeth all things well," and will make "all things to work together for good to them that love him."]

[z] 1 Cor. x. 13.

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## CCCLI.

### THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE.

Ps. xxxi. 19, 20. *Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

THE salvation of the Gospel is a present salvation: the "godliness which it inspires, is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." It is needless to say that the trials of life are great; and that men in every situation of life need the supports and consolations of religion to carry them through the difficulties which they have to encounter. But of the extent to which these supports and consolations are administered to God's chosen people, very little idea can be formed by those who have never experienced a communication of them to their souls.

David

David was highly favoured in this respect. He lived in a state of near and habitual fellowship with God; spreading before him all his wants, and receiving from him such supplies of grace and peace as his daily necessities required. Hence with devout rapture he expresses his admiration of God's goodness to his believing people.

This is the subject which we propose for our present meditation; and which, in correspondence with the words of our text, we shall consider,

I. In a general view—

The terms by which the Lord's people are characterized sufficiently distinguish them from all others, since none but they do truly "fear God," or unfeignedly "put their trust in him." They are the true Israel; in reference to whom it is said, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart[a]."

In speaking of his goodness to them, we shall notice,

1. That which is "laid up for them[b]"—

[In the time of David the great truths of the Gospel were but indistinctly known; the fuller manifestation of them being reserved for the Apostolic age: as St. Paul, quoting a remarkable passage from the prophet Isaiah, says; "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;" and then adds, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit[b]." To the Jewish Church therefore these things are only "laid up," as it were, in types and prophecies: and though made known in the Gospel, they are still but imperfectly viewed by the Christian world; and may be considered as "laid up" for the Church at this time, no less than in former ages: for it is only by slow degrees that any one attains to the knowledge of them; and whatever attainments any one may have made, he sees only "as in a glass darkly," and knows only in part; there being in it a length and breadth and depth and height utterly beyond the power of any finite intelligence to explore[c]. The "riches" that are stored up for us in Christ even in this world are altogether "unsearchable[d]:" what then must the glories be which are "reserved in heaven for us!" The more we contemplate the blessings

[a] Ps. lxxiii. 1. [b] Isai. lxiv. 4. with 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.
[c] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [d] ib. ver. 8.

blessings which God has treasured up for us in the Son of his love — — —, the more shall we exclaim with David, "O how great is his goodness!"]

2. That which God has actually "wrought for them"—

[Every Believer was once "dead in trespasses and sins," even as others. But he has been quickened by the mighty energy of God's Spirit, and been raised up to newness of life. He is "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" all his views, his desires, his purposes, being altogether changed — — — He has the heart of stone taken from him, and an heart of flesh substituted in its place. He has been "made a partaker of the Divine nature," and "been renewed after God's image; and *that*, not in knowledge only, but in righteousness also and true holiness." He is brought altogether into a new state, having been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," and been made "an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ." In a word, he is "begotten to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and never-fading, reserved in heaven for him;" and for the full possession of which he also is *reserved* by the power of God, through the simple exercise of faith[e] — — — All this he has wrought for them "before the sons of men." They are evidently "a seed which the Lord has blessed:" they are "lights in a dark world," "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men" — — —]

But in the latter part of our text, we are called to consider the goodness of God towards his people,

II. With a particular reference to their intercourse with the ungodly world—

Exceeding bitter are those pains which men inflict on each other by calumnies and reproaches—

[To speak good one of another affords no particular pleasure; but to hear and circulate some evil report affords to the carnal mind the highest gratification: and in such employment all the corruptions of our fallen nature find ample scope for exercise and indulgence. Who can estimate the evils arising from "pride," and "the strife of tongues?" Some little idea may be formed from the description given of the tongue by an inspired Apostle: "Behold," says he, "how great a matter a little fire kindleth! The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell[f]." How exceedingly strong are these terms! Yet it is by no means an exaggerated statement of the evils proceeding

[e] 2 Pet. i. 4. [f] Jam. iii. 5, 6.

proceeding from calumny in the world at large: but as representing the virulence and malignity with which men calumniate the people of God, they come yet nearer to the truth. In the very words preceding my text, David faintly portrays the conduct of the ungodly in relation to this matter: "Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak *grievous* things *proudly* and *contemptuously* against the righteous." In another psalm he speaks in far stronger terms: "My soul," says he, "is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword[g]." The truth is, that men can inflict, and often do inflict, far deeper wounds with their tongue than they could with the most powerful weapon. With a sword they can only wound the body: but with bitter and cruel words they wound the inmost soul. Under the former we may easily support ourselves; but "a wounded spirit who can bear?"]

But against these does God provide for his people an effectual antidote—

[Though more exposed than others to the venomous assaults of slander, they have a refuge which the worldling knows not of. They carry their trials to the Lord, and spread them before him; and from him they receive such supports and consolations as more than counterbalance the evils they sustain. "In the secret of God's presence they are *hid*." When nigh to him in prayer, they are hid as in a pavilion, or a royal tent, protected by armed hosts, and furnished with the richest viands[h]. But the full import of these terms cannot adequately be expressed. Who shall say what is implied in those words, "The secret of God's presence?" who shall declare what a fulness of joy is there possessed by the believing suppliant? How powerless are the fiery darts which are hurled at him by the most envenomed foes, whilst God himself is a wall of fire round about him, and the glory of God irradiates his soul, inspiring it with a foretaste of heaven itself! Some little idea of his enjoyment may be formed from the history of Hezekiah at the time of Sennacherib's invasion. It was "a day of trouble, and of rebuke and blasphemy;" and the feelings excited in the bosom of Hezekiah were most distressing: but scarcely had he spread before the Lord the letter which the blaspheming Rabshakeh had sent him, than he was encouraged by God to return this triumphant answer; "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee[i]." Thus, like one who saw "the heavens filled with horses of fire and chariots of fire" for his protection, he set at nought the vain boasts of his enemies, and anticipated a certain triumph. Thus,

[g] Ps. lvii. 4. [h] Ps. xxvii. 5, 6. [i] Isai. xxxvii. 3, 14, 21, 22.

Thus, how malignant soever the Believer's enemies may be, he is hid from them as in an impregnable fortress, and looks down on their fruitless efforts with pity and contempt.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us seek to attain the character here drawn—

[To fear God is the duty, and to trust in him the privilege, of every child of man——Learn then to tremble for fear of his judgments, and to rely on his mercy as revealed to you in his Gospel——for then only can you experience the blessings of his goodness, when you surrender up yourselves to him to be saved by his grace———]

2. Let us enjoy the privileges conferred upon us—

[For a fuller discovery of the Believer's privileges, we may consult the declarations of David in the Psalms[k]——Let us not rest in any thing short of them. Let us get such a sense of them as shall overwhelm us with wonder, and gratitude, and praise———]

[k] Ps. xci. 1—4, 9—16. & lv. 21, 22.

## CCCLII.

### TRUE BLESSEDNESS DECLARED.

Ps. xxxii. 1—6. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: (for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me) my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.*

TO have the experience of David in all the diversified conditions of life faithfully submitted to us, is an advantage for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. There was scarcely any trouble, either of a temporal or spiritual nature, which he was not called to endure, and under which he has not stated to us the workings of his mind. We are accustomed to hear of his sins and his penitence, his sorrows and his joys: but there is one particular frame of mind,

in

in which he continued for many months, which we are apt, for the most part, to overlook, or to pass by with a mere transient observation; I mean, his state of impenitence and hardness of heart after the commission of his sin in the matter of Uriah. But this is an exceedingly profitable point of view in which to behold him, because of the general tendency of sin to harden the heart: and to see how he obtained peace at last is also of great advantage, inasmuch as it will shew us, how we may obtain peace, even after the commission of the greatest transgressions. When he wrote this psalm he had regained that happy state from which he had fallen: and he here records, for the instruction of the Church in all future ages,

I. Wherein true blessedness consists—

A man who has no prospects beyond this present world, will seek happiness in the things of time and sense. But "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." We are immortal beings, and are hastening to a state, where a period will arrive, at which our present existence, even though it should have been continued a thousand years, will have been only as the twinkling of an eye. In that state either happiness or misery awaits us, according as we enter upon it under the guilt of our former sins, or with our sins forgiven. We may justly say, therefore, True happiness consists, as our text informs us, in having our sins forgiven. To elucidate this topic, let us consider the blessing here spoken of,

1. As a non-imputation of sin—

[Who that is in the smallest degree conscious of the number and heinousness of his transgressions, and of the awful punishment due to him on account of them, must not regard it as an unspeakable mercy to have them all blotted out from the book of God's remembrance? What in the whole universe can in his estimation be compared with this? If he could possess the whole world, yea, if he could possess ten thousand worlds, what comfort would the acquisition give him, if he had the melancholy prospect of being speedily plunged into the bottomless abyss of hell?

hell? If there were a large company of condemned criminals, some rich and noble, others poor and ignoble, and one of the meanest of them had received the king's pardon whilst all the rest were left for execution; who among them would be accounted the happiest? How much more then, when the death to which unpardoned sinners are consigned is an everlasting death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone! No one who reads the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and sees the termination of their respective states, can for a moment hesitate to pronounce Lazarus, with all his miseries and privations, far happier in the sense of reconciliation with his God, than the rich worldling in the enjoyment of all his pomp and luxury.]

2. As a positive imputation of righteousness—

[In the words of David we should not have seen the doctrine of imputed righteousness, if St. Paul had not expressly told us that that doctrine was contained in them. He tells us[a], that in these words "David describeth the blessedness of the man *unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Now this idea goes much farther than mere forgiveness: forgiveness exempts from punishment; but an imputation of the Redeemer's righteousness to us insures to us an eternal great reward[b]. O how happy must that man be who is clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and can, on the footing of that righteousness, claim all the glory and felicity of heaven! He may look forward to death and judgment, not only without fear, but with holy confidence and joy, assured, that in God's sight he stands "without spot or blemish." Who, we would ask, can be happy, like the man who has been begotten to a lively hope, that in and through Christ there is reserved for him an incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance in heaven?]

3. As a renovation of soul consequent on reconciliation with God—

[Though sin is pardoned, and righteousness is imputed, purely through the free grace of God to the chief of sinners, without any good works already performed by them[c], yet no pardoned sinner is left in an unholy state: on the contrary, he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind;" "a new heart is given unto him;" and he is made "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." If this were not the case, pardon itself could not make him happy. A soul under the dominion of sin could not be happy,

[a] Rom. iv. 6—8. [b] 2 Cor. v. 21.

[c] Mark the expressions, "the ungodly," "without works," Rom. iv. 5, 6.

happy, even if it were in heaven: sin would eat his vitals, as doth a canker. It is the restoration of the soul to the Divine image that constitutes a very principal part of its felicity: for when we are "holy, as God is holy," then are we happy, as God is happy. We must be careful however not to confound those different sources of happiness. St. Paul was so jealous on this head, that when quoting the words of our text, he omitted these at the close of it, lest any one should imagine that our sanctification were in any respect the ground of our justification before God. Sanctification is the fruit and consequence of our having received a justifying righteousness: and, though it in no respect procures our reconciliation with God in the first instance, (for *that* is procured solely through faith in Christ,) yet it is as inseparably connected with justifying faith, as good fruit is with a good tree: nor can the soul be happy in a sense of the Divine favour, till it has this *evidence* of its acceptance with him.]

But David proceeds to inform us,

II. How he himself attained unto it—

For a long time he was altogether destitute of it—

[Partly through stoutness of heart, and partly through unbelief, he for a long time refused to humble himself for his heinous iniquities. But was he happy during that period? Hear his own representation of his state and feelings: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer." The state of an impenitent sinner is fitly compared to "the troubled sea, which cannot rest, but incessantly casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith God, to the wicked." We have a striking elucidation of this point in the history of Judas and of Peter. Both of them had sinned grievously: but Peter, through the influence of faith, repented; whilst Judas, under the influence of unbelief, sought refuge in suicide from the accusations of his own mind. Thus it is with many who are haunted with a sense of guilt, but will not abase themselves before God: they "roar all the day long;" and "howl upon their beds, like dogs; but they cry not unto God from their inmost souls[d]." Hence they can find no rest, or peace; and often precipitate themselves into the torments of hell, to get rid of the torments of a guilty conscience. Ignorant people impute these acts to religion: but it is the want of religion that produces them: it is the want of true contrition that causes their guilt so to prey upon their minds. "God's hand is heavy upon them," because they will not humble themselves before him: and the longer they continue to set him at defiance, the more may they expect to feel the pressure of his righteous indignation[e] — — —]

At

[d] Hos. vii. 14. [e] See Ps. xxxviii. 1—8. & cii. 3—7.

At last through penitence he attained unto it—

["He at last acknowledged his sin, and confessed his transgressions unto the Lord:" and then God, who delighteth in mercy, spoke peace unto his soul. The transition was indeed surprisingly rapid: "for he only said, I will confess my transgressions, and instantly God forgave the iniquity of his sin[f]." Doubtless God saw the sincerity of his heart: he saw not only that David mourned over his past offences, but was determined through grace to give himself up in future wholly and unreservedly to the Lord: and therefore he would not delay to restore to him the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation. We have a beautiful instance of this rich display of mercy in the parable of the prodigal son ——— as also in the converts on the day of Pentecost ——— and in the Jailer[g] ——— And similar displays of mercy may we ourselves hope for, if only we humble ourselves before him, and seek to be clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness; for "he is rich in mercy unto all who call upon him."]

Having stated thus his own experience, David proceeds to tell us,

III. What improvement we should make of it—

Unspeakably encouraging is the record here given us. We should take occasion from it,

1. To seek the Lord for ourselves—

["The godly" will make their prayer unto God; and the ungodly also should do it. If any man ever had reason to despair, David had, after having so grievously departed from his God. But he cried unto the Lord, and obtained mercy at his hands. Shall the ungodly then say, My sins are too great to be pardoned? Or shall "the godly," after the most horrible backslidings, sit down in despair, and say, "There is no hope?" No: the example of David absolutely forbids this ——— At the same time it shews the folly of delaying repentance: for there is no peace to the soul in an impenitent state: neither here nor hereafter can we be happy in any other way than that which God has marked out for us. If penitential sorrow be painful, it never corrodes like impenitent obduracy: there is in it a melting of soul that participates of the nature of holy joy: and, if "weeping do endure for a night, joy is sure to come in the morning." If then we would be truly happy, let us flee to Christ as the Refuge set before us: he is "the Lord our Righteousness;" and the vilest sinner upon earth shall find his "blood able to cleanse us from all sin," and his righteousness sufficient to clothe our souls, so that the "shame of our nakedness shall never appear." But let us take care,]

2. To

[f] See 2 Sam. xii. 13. [g] Acts xvi. 34.

2. To seek him whilst he may be found—

[There is "a time wherein he may be found" of every one of us; and a time wherein he may not be found. This is an awful truth; but it is attested by many passages of Holy Writ: "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least *in this thy day*, the things that belong unto thy peace!" said our Lord to Jerusalem; "but now they are hid from thine eyes." God may, and does, "give over many to a reprobate mind," and to final impenitence: "So I gave them up." But if you have the least desire of mercy, we are warranted to say, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." O then improve the present hour: "Seek ye the Lord whilst he may be found; call ye upon him whilst he is near." "If you cover your sins, you cannot prosper; but if you confess and forsake them, you shall find mercy." "If you say that you have no sin, you deceive yourselves; but if you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."]

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## CCCLIII.

### DEVOTION EXEMPLIFIED.

Ps. xxxiv. 2, 3. *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

A SENSE of gratitude to God for his mercies will ever abide in some measure on the soul of a true Believer. But there are special occasions whereon he is so impressed with the Divine goodness, that he feels as if he never could forget it, and as if he would have the whole creation join with him in his devout acknowledgments. This was the frame of David's mind, when, by feigning himself mad, he had escaped out of the hands of Achish, who would probably have put him to death, or delivered him into the hands of Saul, his blood-thirsty persecutor[a].

In discoursing on his words, we shall notice,

I. His determination to praise God—

Ungodly men love to boast of themselves—

[There is no man who has not some imaginary excellencies whereof to boast. If we possess any natural endowment either of

[a] Compare 1 Sam. xxi. 10. to xxii. 1. with the title of this psalm.

of mind or body, we are forward to bring it into notice, and to arrogate something to ourselves on account of it. One values herself upon her beauty; another boasts of his strength or courage; another prides himself in his wit, his penetration, or his judgment. Rather than pass unnoticed, the ungodly will boast of their iniquities and excesses; yea, (strange to say!) of iniquities they have not committed, and of excesses to which they have never arrived.]

The godly, on the other hand, "make their boast in the Lord"—

[They know, by bitter experience, that in themselves dwelleth no good thing, yea, nothing but what furnishes matter for the deepest humiliation. But they see in God sufficient to excite their devoutest adoration. Whether they contemplate the perfections of his nature, or the works of his hands, the wonders of his providence, or the riches of his grace, they are filled with wonder and astonishment; and pouring contempt on all created excellencies, they exclaim, "O God! who is like unto thee[b]?" "Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ[c]!"]

The Psalmist was the more induced to praise God in a public manner from a consideration of,

II. The effect he hoped to produce by this means—

He did not expect any particular benefit to accrue to the proud—

[The proud, alas! are disgusted with even the mention of God's name, provided it be with reverence and love: nor do they ever speak of him themselves, unless it be to profane his name in oaths and curses. Their aversion to hear of him increases according to the degree in which he is honoured. They will suffer us to speak somewhat of God as he is manifested in *creation*; but they do not like to be told of his love in *redemption*. They will bear to hear a little of God (though but little) in his works of *providence*; but they cannot endure to hear one syllable of his gloriously rich and sovereign *grace*. If we utter but a word expressive of admiration and love on account of his condescension in revealing himself to our souls, we forfeit at once all title to respectability, and become in their eyes the most contemptible of beings. They would be less offended with oaths and blasphemies and the grossest obscenity, than with one such an expression of love to God.]

But he hoped that to the humble his adorations would afford matter of unfeigned joy—

[The

[b] Deut. xxxii. 31. Exod. xv. 11. Mic. vii. 18. [c] 2 Cor. ii. 14.

[The godly are not so free from pride, but that flattery sometimes finds access to their hearts, and proves a gratification to their unwary minds. But in their better seasons, when their airy dreams have vanished, and they obtain juster views of themselves, they most unfeignedly lothe and abhor themselves, and desire that God alone should be exalted. To be told of their own goodness is nauseous and unpalatable: but to hear the praises of their God and Saviour, this is delightful to their souls. It is this that endears to them the Ministers of God: he who with the clearest evidence and richest unction exhibits to their view the glory and excellency of their God, will be regarded as their best friend: and every one who in sincerity labours to fulfil this office, will be "esteemed by them very highly in love for his work's sake."]

To stir up within ourselves a similar disposition, let us consider,

III. His exhortation to co-operate with him in this blessed design—

He calls on all of us to unite with him in praising and adoring God: and his exhortation may well serve as an APPLICATION to the foregoing subject. We ask then,

1. Is it not a *reasonable* employment?

[Let any one call to mind the excellencies of God as they are described in Scripture, and then say whether it is not reasonable that we should exalt his name. But more particularly, let the wonders of Redemption be surveyed (O wonders inexpressible, and surpassing all comprehension!); let the thought of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son becoming man, of his dying upon the cross, of his living again to make intercession for us in heaven; let the thought of this being done to deliver our souls from death, and to restore us to the favour of our offended Father; let this, I say, dwell upon the mind, and we shall see at once the reasonableness of this duty, and the utter unreasonableness of passing one day or one hour without renewed expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving.]

2. Is it not a *delightful* employment?

[Poor indeed is the mirth of this world, when compared with the joy of praising God. This is the work of all the glorified saints and angels: "they rest not day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts."

And if this be the employment of heaven, what must such an exercise be to us, but a heaven upon earth? It is indeed a foretaste of heaven, as all who have ever engaged in it are constrained

strained to acknowledge: nor, if we were always thus engaged, would any trouble or sorrow be able to molest us: our very afflictions would rather give energy to our souls, and enlarge at once our subjects of praise, and our disposition to abound in it.]

3. Is it not a *necessary* employment?

[It is grievous on such a subject as this to insinuate any thing of an alarming nature: but, if men will not be "constrained by love," we must endeavour to "persuade them by the terrors of the Lord."

God declared to his people of old, that, if they would not serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things which he had so liberally bestowed upon them, they should endure all the curses denounced in his law[d]. With how much greater force does this threatening come to us, if we neglect to praise him for the infinitely greater benefits he has conferred on us! We ourselves feel indignant if great and acknowledged virtues be despised, or eminent favours be disregarded. And shall God ever look with complacency on those who are blind to his excellencies, and insensible of his favours? Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, none shall ever join the choir above, whose hearts have not been tuned to sing God's praise below.]

[d] Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

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## CCCLIV.

### THE FEAR OF GOD INCULCATED.

Ps. xxxiv. 11—16. *Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good: seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

TO enlighten a dark world, and to guide wanderers into the paths of peace and holiness, is the most glorious office that can be committed to a human being. So at least David thought: for though he was well qualified to teach men the science of music (in which he eminently excelled), or the art of war (in which he was a great proficient), or the principles by which states and kingdoms should be governed, he considered none of those employments comparable to that of instructing men in the principles and practice of true religion. As a prophet of the Lord, (for at the

the time the psalm was written he was not yet exalted to the throne of Israel,) he regarded all, to whom he had access, as his children; and was anxious, as a loving parent, to gain their attention, that he might instil into their minds those truths which he himself felt to be of supreme importance. He wished in particular to shew them, what we also are desirous to point out to you,

I. Wherein the fear of the Lord consists—

The fear of the Lord is such a reverential regard to him as inclines us to walk in all things according to his revealed will, and to approve ourselves to him,

1. In our words—

["Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak;" and every evil that is in the heart will betray itself by the tongue. Truly the tongue is justly called an unruly member: like a helm of a ship, it is but a small matter; but it boasteth great things. It is declared by God himself to be "a world of iniquity;" "a fire, setting in flames the course of nature, and itself set on fire of hell." So untameable is it, that the man who bridles it on all occasions is pronounced to be "a perfect man:" whilst, on the other hand, the man who has no command over it, however religious he may fancy himself, or be thought by others, he is a self-deceiver, whose religion is vain[a]. It is therefore with great propriety that David specifies the controul of the tongue as the first evidence of the fear of God; "Whoso desireth life, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile." Not only must all profane speeches and all impure communications be forborne, but every thing that is false and deceitful, or corrupt in any way whatever. Every proud, angry, passionate, revengeful word must be suppressed, whatever may be the provocation to utter it: all calumny, detraction, uncharitableness, tale-bearing, must be avoided, and "the law of truth and of kindness be continually in the lips." God has said, that "of every idle word we must give account in the day of judgment," and that "by our words we shall be either justified or condemned;" and therefore the fear of the Lord must of necessity cause us to "take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue."]

2. In our actions—

[Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates:" and it should be universally and irreconcileably hated by us: "We must depart from evil, and do good." Whatever evil we may have been most

[a] See Jam. iii. 2—8.

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most tempted, and most accustomed, to commit, that is the evil against which we must most watchfully guard, and from which we must most resolutely depart — — — On the other hand, we must be occupied in doing good. The doing of good should be the great business of life: first, the doing good to our own household; then to all our neighbours; then to the Church of God at large. The devising of good, and the executing of good, and the uniting with others in the good devised by them, and the stirring up all around us to do good according to their opportunities and ability; *this* is a life worthy of a Christian, and necessarily flowing from the fear of God. If we truly fear God, we shall "abhor that which is evil, and cleave (be glued) to that which is good," and "be fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."]

3. In our whole spirit and temper—

[A peaceful, loving spirit will characterize every Child of God. "God is love;" and all his Children will resemble him in this glorious attribute. True it is, that it is not always *possible* to be at peace, because some are so wicked and unreasonable that they will take occasion even from our very peacefulness to injure us the more. Hence St. Paul says, "*If it be possible,* as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Whether we succeed or not, our constant aim and effort must be for peace. For the preservation of it we should account no sacrifice too great: and we should be as studious to promote it amongst others, as to preserve it with ourselves. If we see an unkind spirit prevailing any where, we should endeavour to extinguish the fire, and not, by countenancing it, add fuel to the flame. The evil of contention is so great, that no one who possesses heavenly wisdom will engage in it himself, or encourage it in others[b]. If we fear the Lord indeed, our constant labour will be to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."]

Whilst explaining thus wherein the fear of the Lord consists, the Psalmist points out,

II. The importance of cultivating it in our own hearts—

As for those who had no concern about their souls, he did not expect them to hearken to such self-denying lessons as he endeavoured to inculcate: but to those who desired true happiness in this world and the next, he gave the advice which we have already considered[c]. To enforce his advice, he assured them of,

1. God's

[b] Jam. iii. 13—18.

[c] ver. 12.

1. God's favour to them that fear him—

[" The eyes of the Lord," says he, " are upon the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry." Not a moment are they out of his sight, nor for a moment is he inattentive to their prayers. Are they in danger? He will protect them, and cause his angel to encamp around them, that no enemy may approach to hurt them[d]———Are they in want? He will supply them with all that is needful for them. " The lions that could prey upon them shall want and suffer hunger; but *they* shall want no manner of thing that is good," for body or for soul, for time or for eternity[e]———Are they in trouble? He will assuredly in due time deliver them. They may have many troubles; but he will deliver them from all, the very instant they have accomplished their destined office[f]. He sends the trials to purify them from their dross: and he sits by the furnace, ready to bring them out, in the proper season, " purified as gold." Are they longing for his presence here, and his glory hereafter? He will " be nigh unto their souls" in this world, and will save them in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation in the world to come[g]. In a word, there shall be an infinite distance between them and others: for they shall enjoy all the richest blessings of redemption, whilst those who cast off the fear of God shall be left inconsolably and for ever desolate[h]. What inducements are here to seek that holy disposition of mind inculcated in our text!]

2. His indignation against those who fear him not—

[God does not merely withhold his blessings from these persons, but actually becomes their enemy: he does not only *turn his face from* them, but *sets his face against* them: " he walks contrary to them who thus walk contrary to him." Hear how indignantly he speaks to those who profess to reverence him, but in fact dishonour him by their conduct: " Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say[i]?" Yea, he declares that whatever profession of religion they may make, they shall never enter into his kingdom: " Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven[k]." He intimates, that in the day of judgment there will be many who will confidently claim heaven, as it were, on account of their zeal and success in his service: but that, forasmuch as they were destitute of all these holy dispositions, he will not acknowledge them as his, but bid them to depart accursed into everlasting fire[l]. In a word, he declares that by their fruits only shall they be known either in this world or the next[m].

It

[d] ver. 7. [e] ver. 9, 10. [f] ver. 17, 19. [g] ver. 18.
[h] ver. 21, 22. [i] Luke vi. 46. [k] Matt. vii. 21.
[l] ib. ver. 22, 23. [m] ib. ver. 18—20.

It must however be remembered, that though the exercise of these holy dispositions is pleasing and acceptable to God, it is not meritorious in itself; nor can it found a claim for our justification before God. A reward, it is true, will be given us; but it is "a reward of grace, and not of debt." It is in Christ only that we can have a justifying righteousness; nevertheless our works will be regarded as the evidences of our faith: if our faith wrought in the way above mentioned, we shall be acknowledged as Christ's redeemed people; but if it did not, it will be considered as dead; and we shall be cast out as hypocrites and self-deceivers.]

Suffer now a word of EXHORTATION. Two things we intreat of you;

1. To labour for practical religion—

[There are many professors of religion who love to hear of the privileges of the Lord's people, but not to hear of their duties; and they call such subjects as the foregoing, *legal*: but they who do so, understand neither what legality is, nor what the Gospel is. *Legality* is a leaning, either in whole or in part, to the works of the law to justify us before God: and if we encouraged that, we might justly be regarded as abandoning and subverting the Gospel of Christ. But, when we teach persons to fear the Lord, and, from a desire of his favour in Christ, and from a dread of his displeasure, to approve ourselves to God in the whole of their life and conversation, we do only what the Apostles of our Lord also did: for St. Peter quotes the very words of our text in the precise way in which we have insisted upon them[n]: and therefore we are sure that an attention to them becomes us under the Gospel. We further say, that the people who set themselves up for judges in this way are ignorant also of the Gospel. The Gospel consists of two parts, doctrine and practice, just as a house consists of a foundation and a superstructure. But who would choose a place for his habitation that has a foundation indeed, but neither walls nor roof? or who would call such a structure *a house?* So doctrines, however sound, will not answer the ends of the Gospel, nor can they be properly called the Gospel, unless they stand connected with good works as issuing from them and built upon them. The doctrines are the foundation; the good works are the superstructure: and then only are the doctrines available for our salvation, when they operate to the production of universal holiness. This is the account which our blessed Lord himself gives of his Gospel: and he alone is truly wise, who embraces and builds upon it in this view[o].]

2. To cultivate a child-like spirit—

[We

[n] 1 Pet. iii. 10—12. [o] Matt. vii. 24—27.

[We have addressed you as "children:" and though there may be many present who are "young men and fathers," yet must we say, that an advance towards Christian perfection will always be manifested by a proportionate growth in humility. Our blessed Lord told his Apostles, that whoever amongst them most fully attained the tempers and dispositions of a "little child, the same would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Let your growth then be seen in this way: then, whatever be taught you, it will be "received with meekness, as an engrafted word, able and effectual to save your souls." Indeed without this disposition of mind no man can have that "honest and good heart," which alone will nourish the seed that is sown in it, and enable it to "bring forth fruit unto perfection."

To those who are really but young in age, a teachable spirit is indispensable to their improvement. O let such listen to the voice of their teachers with humility and gratitude! let them especially also look unto the Holy Spirit of God, to apply the word unto their hearts: and let them "not be hearers only of the Gospel, but doers of it also," lest the privileges they enjoy lead only to the deceiving and ruining of their own souls.]

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## CCCLV.

### THE SINNER'S HOPE.

Ps. xxxv. 3. *Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*

SUSPENSE is extremely painful to the human mind, and the more so in proportion to the danger to which we are exposed. David experienced this in a very high degree. In the psalm before us, he appears to have been greatly agitated with fear on account of the number and malignity of the enemies who sought his ruin, and were exulting in the expectation of his speedy fall. Seeing no hope for himself in the efforts of his adherents, he betook himself to prayer, and with most earnest importunity implored that help from his Creator which the creature was unable to afford. And as it was with an armed host that he was beset, he addressed the Lord under the character of a mighty warrior, to stand forth in his defence: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw

Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

This last petition I propose to consider,

I. As offered by him—

Nothing could exceed the bitterness of David's enemies—

[If we mark the diversified expressions in this psalm, we shall have some idea of the danger to which he was exposed. Saul having determined if possible to destroy him, his subjects of every description leagued together to execute his will. "False witnesses rose up, and laid to David's charge things which he knew not;" and, in confirmation of their accusations, declared that they were eye-witnesses of the acts imputed to him[a]. Among the number of these were many on whom he had conferred the greatest obligations[b], and to whom he had given no just occasion of offence[c]. "They devised deceitful matters against him[d]:" "they hid a net for him, and digged a pit for his soul[e]." To encourage one another in their odious work, "they winked with their eye[f];" and, when they thought they had prevailed against him, "they rejoiced in his adversity[g];" and "magnified themselves against him[h]," and "said in their hearts, Ah! so would we have it: we have swallowed him up[i]." The very abjects, encouraged by the example of their superiors, gathered themselves together against him, and tare him incessantly; whilst hypocritical mockers in their feasts, (pretending to more humanity,) yet "gnashed upon him with their teeth[k]." In a word, all classes of the community lay in wait for his soul[l], and, like lions prowling for their prey, sought to destroy and to devour him[m].]

Under these circumstances he cried to God for help—

[The particular expression in our text is worthy of notice, especially as shewing what thoughts the Psalmist entertained of God. He believed *that God was able* to deliver him, how powerful soever his enemies might be. He knew, that if God was for him, "no weapon that was formed against him could prosper." Nor did he doubt *the goodness of God*, as willing to hear and answer his petitions, and to afford him the protection which he so earnestly desired. But that which chiefly demands our attention is, his persuasion of *the condescension of the Most High*, in that he prayed, not merely for deliverance, but for such

[a] ver. 11, 21. [b] ver. 12. [c] ver. 19. [d] ver. 20. [e] ver. 7.
[f] ver. 19. [g] ver. 15. [h] ver. 26. [i] ver. 26.
[k] ver. 15, 16. [l] ver. 4. [m] ver. 17, 25.

such an assurance of it to his soul, as should calm all the tumult of his mind, and fill him with perfect peace.

Now this was the sure way to succeed in prayer. Nothing so secures the interposition of God in our behalf, as the magnifying of him in our hearts: "Them that honour him, he will honour." If we limit his mercies, he will limit his gifts. If we doubt his power or willingness to help, he will withhold such displays of his mercy as he would otherwise have vouchsafed[n]. On the other hand, if we be stedfast in believing expectations of his mercy, we shall have such discoveries of his glory as an unbelieving heart has no conception of[o]. We should never forget, that there is nothing too great to ask of God. We never can "open our mouth so wide, but he will fill it[p]:" nor can we ever be more enlarged in our petitions towards him, than he will be in his communications towards us[q].]

But the petition in our text is still more deserving of attention,

II. As suited to us—

Imminent as David's dangers were, they were not to be compared with those to which we are exposed—

[David's enemies might be eluded, intimidated, vanquished: but those with which the soul of every sinner is encompassed can never be eluded, never be overcome.

*Sin* is a deadly foe, that seeks to destroy every child of man. It lies in wait for us, to allure, to deceive, to ruin us. It clothes itself in specious array: it comes with a friendly aspect: it bids us fear no harm: it tells us, "We shall have peace, though we yield to its fascinations[r]." But it is no sooner committed, than it is registered in the book of God's remembrance, and will come forth at a future period as a swift witness against all whom it has deceived. From man it may be hidden: and even by those who have committed it, it may be forgotten: but "it hunts the wicked man to overthrow him[s];" and though it do not immediately seize the sinner as its prey, "it will be sure to find him out[t]," and, like a millstone about his neck, to sink him into everlasting perdition[u].

*The law of God* also follows with its curses all who have transgressed its commands[x]. It is inexorable. It is a creditor that cannot be satisfied, or appeased. It will take the sinner by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest:" and, when we cannot discharge our debt, "it will listen to no intreaties, but will cast us into prison, till we have paid the uttermost farthing." God himself appealed to his people of old respecting this: "My words, and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets,

[n] Matt. xiii. 58.
[o] John xi. 40.
[p] Ps. lxxxi. 10.
[q] 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.
[r] Deut. xxix. 19.
[s] Ps. cxl. 11.
[t] Numb. xxxii. 23.
[u] Jam. i. 14, 15.
[x] Gal. iii. 10.

Prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned, and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us[y]." Of the six hundred thousand men who came out of Egypt, how many entered into Canaan? Not one, except Joshua and Caleb, who "had followed the Lord fully." Against all the rest a sentence of death was denounced in the very first year of their sojourning in the wilderness: and at the close of the forty years a minute inquiry was instituted; and not one was found alive[z]. So it will be found in the last day, that of all the threatenings in the book of God not one has fallen to the ground; and that, of all who mourned not over their transgressions of the law, not one escaped the vengeance of his God. God has said, "Their foot shall slide in due time[a]:" he has declared that "they shall all be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget him[b]:" that "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; and that this shall be the portion of their cup[c]:" he has declared it, I say; and, whether we will believe it or not, his law shall be thus honoured, and his justice shall be thus magnified, on every impenitent transgressor: for already is he "whetting his sword for the execution of his vengeance upon them; and soon will he make his arrows drunk with their blood[d]." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die[e]."

There is yet another adversary, who is lying in wait for our souls, and, like a roaring lion, going about, seeking to devour us; and that is *Satan:* nor can we have any conception of the wiles and devices to which he has recourse, in order to accomplish his malignant purpose. Even in Paradise he prevailed to ensnare and ruin our first parents: and the same temptations he puts in our way, assuring us, that, in following his counsel, we shall have unqualified pleasure, and happiness without alloy. He is in Scripture compared to "a fowler[f]; and, like a fowler, he spreads his nets, and allures us by temptations suited to our appetites; and by the example of sinners whom he has already ensnared, and whom he makes use of to decoy us. We see nothing but the promised gratification; and whilst one or another invites us to participate his supposed joys, we flock to him, "without considering that it is for our life[g]." Thus it is the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer is ensnared: he thinks of nothing but his pleasure: but the fowler who lays the snare, foresees and prognosticates the end. Having succeeded in "taking us alive[h]," he "keeps us in peace[i]," and does all he can to hide from us our bondage: but he knows, that they who now

[y] Zech. i. 6.
[z] Numb. xiv. 28, 29, 35—38.
[a] Deut. xxxii. 35.
[b] Ps. ix. 17.
[c] Ps. xi. 6.
[d] Deut. xxxii. 41, 42.
[e] Ezek. xviii. 4.
[f] Ps. xci. 3.
[g] Prov. vii. 23.
[h] ἐζωγρημένοι. 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[i] Luke xi. 21.

now yield to his solicitations as a tempter, will soon experience his power as a tormentor.

Another enemy also that is confederate against us, is *death*. He is waiting every moment to execute his commission against us; well knowing, that the instant he can inflict the stroke he meditates, all hope of our deliverance is at an end for ever. He has his eye steadily fixed on persons of every age and station: and the instruments he has at his command are as numerous as the sands upon the sea shore. When he comes in his more visible and gradual assaults, he contrives to hide his ultimate designs, and to divert the minds of the sufferers from the thoughts of an hereafter. As the avenger of sin he entered into the world[k]: and in the same character he is daily sweeping millions from the earth, and bearing in malignant triumph his unhappy victims to the tribunal of their God.

*Hell* too combines with all the rest, and is opening wide its jaws to receive its destined prey. What the prophet said respecting the king of Babylon, may be said to every impenitent sinner under heaven: "Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming[l]." As in that instance "it stirred up the chief ones of the earth, and raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations" to exult over the fallen monarch, so those persons who were once our partners in sin, or whom by our example we hardened in their iniquities, will all come forth to meet us, that they may in the midst of all their own torments have the malignant pleasure of beholding and of aggravating ours. It is said, that in the last day "the angels will bind up sinners *in bundles* to burn them;" and for this end, no doubt, that they who have been associates in wickedness may, by their mutual execrations, augment each other's misery to all eternity. For this all hell is waiting. We are told indeed respecting the rich man, who, lifting up his eyes in torments, desired that a messenger might be sent to his five surviving brethren, to "warn them, lest they also should come into the same place of torment:" but this was not from any love to them, but from self-love; knowing as he did, by bitter experience, how greatly his own sufferings would be increased by the reproaches of those whom by his influence and example he had so contributed to destroy.

Know ye then, Beloved, that if David was in danger from the thousands who sought his life, so are ye ten thousand times more in danger from *sin*, which deceives you; from *the law*, which denounces its curse against you; from *Satan*, who arms against you all the hosts of hell; from *death*, that is ever waiting to cut you down; and from *hell*, that is already yawning to swallow you up.]

Say then whether David's petition be not altogether suited to *our* state?

[*To*

[k] Rom. v. 12. [l] Isai. xiv. 9.

[*To whom will you go for salvation, if not to the Lord Jesus Christ?* Will you look to any efforts of your own? Can you ever cancel the guilt of sin? Can you ever satisfy the demands of God's law? Can you ever vanquish Satan and all the powers of darkness? Can you ever overcome death and hell, so that they shall lose all their terrors, and have no power over you? The hope of any such thing were vain: it is impossible: and if the whole world were combined to aid you, they could effect nothing. "Though hand joined in hand" throughout the globe, "no sinner in the universe could go unpunished[m]." None can ever blot out one single sin, but He who made atonement for sin by the blood of his cross. None can silence the demands of God's law, but He who endured its penalties, and obeyed its precepts, in order that he might "bring in an everlasting righteousness," and "make us the righteousness of God in him." None can "bruise Satan under our feet," but He who "triumphed over him upon the cross," and in his ascension "led captivity itself captive." None can divest death and hell of their terrors, but "He who has the keys of both, and openeth so that none can shut, and shutteth so that none can open."

*Go then to him for it in David's words;* "Lord, say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Offer this petition humbly: offer it earnestly: offer it in faith ——— Never, from the foundation of the world, did he cast out one who came to him in sincerity and truth. If you plead with him in faith, all these enemies shall be subdued before you; and all your sorrows be turned into joy. See, in the prophecies of Isaiah, what your state shall then be: "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation! I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation[n]." Here you see that he will not only give you *the deliverance* you desire, but *the assurance* of it also, saying to your soul, "*I am* thy salvation." Beloved Brethren, think what blessedness you will then enjoy. See it in David: "My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God[o]." He then encourages you to follow his example: "Trust in him at all times, ye people: pour out your hearts before him: God is a refuge for us[p]." This is the very advice which I would give also: "Pour out your hearts before him, and trust in him." For, what happiness can you possess in *this world*, whilst your soul, your immortal soul, is in such imminent danger? If you were only, like David, encompassed

[m] Prov. xii. 21.
[n] Isai. xii. 1, 2.
[o] Ps. lxii. 5—7.
[p] ib. ver. 8.

encompassed with armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you, you would be full of alarm and terror: and can you enjoy a moment's ease, while it is doubtful whether in the space of a few days you shall not lie down in everlasting burnings? I pray you to awake from your security: and "give neither sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eye-lids," till you have a good and well-founded hope, that Jesus is your Saviour, and till you are enabled to say with Paul, "He has loved me, and given himself for me."]

## CCCLVI.

### COMPASSION TO THE SICK.

Ps. xxxv. 13, 14. *As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.*

THE precepts of Christianity appear to be so pure and exalted, that all attempt to obey them must be vain. This is particularly the case with respect to the conduct which is to be observed towards those who injure us. To forgive them, is not sufficient. We must not only forbear to avenge ourselves upon them, but must do them good, and act towards them with most unbounded benevolence: "I say unto you," says our Lord, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." But this duty is by no means impracticable: for even under the Law it was practised to an astonishing extent by David, who laboured to the uttermost, not only "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Scarcely any thing could exceed the bitterness of Saul towards his servant David: yet when David had him altogether, and as it should seem by a special intervention of Providence, in his power, he would neither hurt him himself, nor suffer him to be hurt by others: nay more, when either Saul, or any of those who joined with him in his relentless persecution of an unoffending servant, were stricken with any

any disease by God himself, so far from rejoicing at it, or even being unconcerned about it, he laid it to heart, and set himself by fasting and prayer to obtain for them a removal, or at least a sanctified improvement, of their sufferings: in a word, he felt for them as if they had been his dearest friends, or his most honoured relatives.

Whilst this conduct of David evinced the height of his attainments in relation to a forgiving spirit, it shewed how justly he estimated the condition of a man oppressed with sickness, and at the same time destitute of the consolations of religion, and unprepared to meet his God. This is a subject deserving of peculiar attention: for, in truth, it is very seldom viewed as it ought to be, even by religious characters. Slighter feelings of sympathy are common enough; but such as are described in our text are rarely experienced. To excite them in all our hearts, we shall shew,

I. How much the sick stand in need of our compassion—

Ungodly men, whether in health or sickness, are in a truly pitiable condition; for "they are walking in darkness, and ignorant whither they are going," whilst they are on the very brink and precipice of the bottomless abyss of hell. But in sickness they are peculiar objects of our compassion: for,

They are then bereft of all that they before enjoyed—

[The pleasures of society, the sports of the field, the amusements of the theatre or the ball, and even the researches of science, have now lost their relish — — — They have neither strength nor spirits for such employments. Even the light itself, which is so cheering to those in health, is almost excluded from their chamber, because of their inability to endure its splendor.]

Nor have they any substitute to repair their loss—

[Those who were their companions in pleasure, have no taste for those things which alone would administer comfort in this trying hour. They may make from time to time their complimentary inquiries, but they cannot sympathize with the afflicted, and, by participation, lighten their burthens. If they come

come to visit their friend, they have nothing to speak of but vanity, nothing that can strengthen his weak hands, or sustain his troubled mind. "Miserable comforters are they all, and physicians of no value." Nor does the sick person himself find it so easy to turn his mind to heavenly things as he once imagined. When immersed in the world, he supposed that it would be time enough to think of eternity when he should be laid aside by sickness; and he concluded that in that season he should feel no difficulty in turning his mind to heavenly contemplations: but he now finds that this is a very unfavourable season for such employments, and that pain or lassitude unfit him for them. He cannot collect his mind; he cannot fix it with any energy on things to which it has been a stranger: and the feelings of the body almost incapacitate him from attending to the concerns of the soul. Thus, however he may abound in worldly wealth and honour, he is a poor, destitute, unhappy being — — —]

But the distress of the sick is greatly aggravated, if poverty be added to all their other trials—

[A poor man in a state of health is as happy as his richer neighbours: but when he falls into sickness, his condition is very pitiable. He is unable to procure the aid which his disorders call for: yea, he cannot provide even the necessaries of life. His family, deprived of his earnings, fall into the extremest want. The little comforts which they have hitherto had for clothing by day and for rest by night, now are sold one after another to supply food for the body, or are pledged never more to be redeemed. Cold, hunger, and nakedness greatly aggravate the pressure of their disorders; and the miseries of a dependent family are an overwhelming addition to the weight already insupportable. The resources which might somewhat alleviate the sorrows of one in opulence, are wholly wanting to the poor: so that, if they have not the consolations of religion to support them in their sickness, they are objects of the deepest commiseration.]

Let us then consider,

II. What is that measure of compassion which we ought to exercise towards them—

If we consider only the temporal distress of the sick, our sympathy with them should be deep—

[It is not sufficient to express a few words of commiseration, and to send a little relief; we should feel for them as for ourselves; and bear a part of their burthens in our spirit, no less than in our purse. It was in this way that Job exercised this amiable disposition: "Did not I weep for him that was in

trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor[a]?" And it is in this way that we also must fulfil the law of Christ[b]———]

But more especially should we feel this from a regard for their souls—

[Pious as David was, we can have no doubt but that in his griefs for Saul and Doeg, he had respect to their spiritual, as well as their temporal, condition. And this accounts for the strong feelings expressed in our text. He knew in what a fearful state they would be found, if they should die impenitent: and therefore, to obtain for them, if possible, a deliverance from such a heavy judgment, he fasted, and prayed, and clothed himself with sackcloth, and pleaded with God in their behalf, just as if they had been his dearest friends or relatives. He forgot all the injuries which they had done him, and were daily heaping up upon him, from a persuasion that they did infinitely greater injury to their own souls, than it was possible for them to do to him. The thought of the danger in which they were of perishing for ever, quite overwhelmed him, so that he was bowed down, and as it were inconsolable, on their account. Now this is precisely the state in which our minds should be towards persons on a bed of sickness, whether they be rich or poor, friends or enemies. Their souls should be precious in our eyes: and we should exercise towards them that very same love which filled the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich[c]." Nor let it be thought that this is proper for Ministers only, or for those who have nothing else to occupy their time. David was accustomed to scenes of blood, and occupied day and night with the laborious duties of a General; yet *he* blended the feelings of sympathy and compassion with the intrepidity and ardour of a man of war. In like manner should *we*, however high our station, or numerous our engagements, find time and inclination for all the offices of Christian love.]

That we may be stirred up to such benevolence, let us contemplate,

III. The benefit that will accrue from it to our own souls—

Our exertions, however great, may not always prosper in the way we could wish—

[We fear that Saul and Doeg were but little profited by the sympathy of David. And we also may abound in visiting the sick, and see but little fruit of our labour. Indeed, much of the fruit which

[a] Job xxx. 25. [b] Gal. vi. 2. Rom. xii. 15. [c] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

which we think we see, proves only like the blossom that is soon nipped by the frost, and disappoints our expectations. Not that our labour shall be altogether in vain[d]. We are persuaded, that if we labour with assiduity and tenderness to benefit the souls of men, God will make *some* use of us. Like Isaiah, we may have occasion to say, Who hath believed our report; yet, like him, we shall have in the last day some to present to the Lord, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me." "The bread that we have cast upon the waters shall, in part at least, be found after many days."]

But our labour shall surely be recompensed into our own bosom—

[So David found it: his fastings and prayers, if lost to others, were not lost to himself: "they returned into his own bosom." And thus it will be with us. The very exercise of love, like the incense which regales the offerer with its odours, is a rich recompence to itself. Moreover, every exercise of love strengthens the habit of love in our souls, and thereby transforms us more and more into the Divine image. And may we not say, that exercises of love will bring God himself down into the soul? We appeal to those who are in the habit of visiting the chambers of the sick, whether they have not often found God more present with them on such occasions than at any other time or place? Have they not often, when they have gone with coldness, and even with reluctance, to visit the sick, received such tokens of God's acceptance, as have filled them with shame and self-abhorrence, for not delighting more in such offices of love?

But, if even *here* so rich a recompence is given, what shall we receive *hereafter*, when every act of love will be recorded, acknowledged, recompensed; and not even a cup of cold water given for the sake of Christ, shall lose its reward? Little as we think of such actions, (and little we ought to think of them *as done by ourselves*,) our God and Saviour regards them with infinite delight, and will accept every one of them as done unto himself: "I was sick and in prison, and ye visited ME." Let all then know, that if they thus invite the sick, the lame, the blind, to participate with them in their temporal and spiritual advantages, "they shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just[dd]."]

ADDRESS,

1. The poor—

[We have represented you as *in some respects* under great disadvan-

[d] If this be the subject of a Sermon for *a Visiting Society*, or *Hospital*, any particular good that has been done to the souls of men may here be distinctly specified.

[dd] Luke xiv. 14. Heb. vi. 10.

disadvantages in a time of sickness: but *in other respects* the advantage is altogether on your side. The friends of the rich are almost uniformly bent on keeping from them all those who would seek to benefit their souls: and, if one get access to them, one scarcely dares to speak, except in gentle hints and dark insinuations; whilst their friends in general are doing all they can to divert their minds from all serious religion. But such friends as these give themselves no trouble about you, whilst the benevolent Christian who visits you begins at once to instruct you in the things that belong to your everlasting peace. Thus all the treasures of redeeming love are opened to you, whilst they are studiously withheld from the rich; and all the consolations of the Gospel are poured into your souls, whilst even a taste of them is denied to thousands, either through their own contempt of Christ, or through the blindness and prejudice of ungodly friends. Know ye then, that if on account of your want of temporal comforts we compassionate your state, we rather congratulate you on the advantages you enjoy for your immortal souls. God has said, that "he has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom;" and therefore we call upon you to take *this* into your estimate of your condition, and to adore God for having chosen better for you than you would have chosen for yourselves.]

2. Those who engage in visiting the poor—

[This is a good and blessed office, in the conscientious discharge of which, religion in no small degree consists[e]. Abound then, as far as your situation and circumstances will admit of it, in this holy work: but take especial care that you perform it in a proper spirit. If you would have those whom you visit to weep, you yourself must be filled with compassion, and weep over them. This is a state of mind which an angel might envy. Never did Jesus himself appear more glorious, not even on Mount Tabor, than when he wept at the grave of Lazarus[f]. Nor does God ever delight in his people more than when he sees them abounding in acts of love to men for their Redeemer's sake[g]. Only see to it that you "draw out not your purse only, but "*your souls*" also to the afflicted, and God will recompense it into your bosom an hundred-fold[h].]

3. The congregation at large—

[In order to administer relief to any extent, considerable funds are necessary: and where any measure of benevolence exists, it will be a pleasure to contribute towards the carrying on a work of such incalculable importance. When St. Paul went up to confer with the Apostles at Jerusalem, they added nothing to his knowledge of the Gospel; "only they would that he should

[e] Jam. i. 27.
[f] John xi. 35.
[g] Matt. vi. 4.
[h] Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

should remember the poor: the same which I also (says he) was forward to do[i]." To you then would we recommend the same benevolent disposition; and we pray God that there may be in you the same readiness to cultivate it to the uttermost. All may not have time or ability to do much in instructing and comforting the poor: but all, even the widow with a single mite, may testify their love to the poor, and their desire to advance the good work in which a select number are engaged. Even those who are "in deep poverty may abound unto the riches of liberality[k]." Let all then "prove the sincerity of their love to Christ" by their compassion to his poor members[l]; and let them know, that "even a cup of cold water given for his sake shall in no wise lose its reward."]

[i] Gal. i. 10. [k] 2 Cor. viii. 1—4. [l] ib. ver. 8.

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## CCCLVII.

### CONFIDENCE IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. xxxvii. 3—6. *Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.*

IT might be supposed that God, the righteous Governor of the universe, would in this world distinguish his people from his enemies by his visible dispensations towards them: but he does not: he suffers "all things to come alike to all; so that none can discern either love or hatred by all that is before them[a]." This is often a stumbling-block to the righteous, who are apt to be discouraged, when they see the prosperity of the wicked, and are themselves suffering all manner of adversity. David was at one time greatly dejected, or rather, I should say, offended, at this very thing; and was led to imagine that he had served God for nought[b]. To guard us against such mistaken views of Providence, and against the feelings which they are wont to excite in the breast, he wrote this psalm. That we may not

[a] Eccl. ix. 1, 2. [b] Ps. lxxiii. 1—14.

not repine at the success of evil-doers, he teaches us to consider, how short their triumph is, and how awful will be their end. He then, in the words of our text, instructs us,

I. What we are to do for God—

It is here taken for granted that we have many difficulties to contend with. But instead of being discouraged by them, our duty to God is,

1. To go on steadily in his service—

["Trust thou in the Lord, and do good." It should be an established principle in our hearts, that duty is ours, and events are God's; and that we should attend to our own concerns, and leave God to his. Now beyond all doubt our great concern is, to prosecute and "finish the work which God has given us to do." We should not merely attend to good works in general, but consider what is that particular "good" which God is calling us to do: perhaps it is, to exercise meekness and patience; or perhaps to put forth fortitude and firmness. In the event of persecution for righteousness' sake, these graces must be cultivated with more than ordinary attention, and be called into action in a more than ordinary degree. We are not to be perplexing our minds with inquiries how we may avert the storm which is gathering around us, but be solely careful not to be shaken either in our principles or conduct, or in any respect to dishonour that God whom we profess to serve. Without this fidelity in the path of duty, all trust in God will be a delusion: but, combined with it, our trust in him is a most pleasing and acceptable service.]

2. To seek our happiness in his presence—

[Fidelity itself would not be acceptable, if it proceeded from a principle of slavish fear: we must regard God as a Father, and "delight ourselves in him." It is not a low measure of spirituality that we should aim at: we should aspire after such an enjoyment of God as David himself spake of, when he said, "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy[b]." In order to this, we should meditate upon all his glorious perfections, and especially on those perfections as displayed and magnified in the work of Redemption. Oh! what wonders of love and mercy may we see in our incarnate, our redeeming God! In the contemplation of these we should exercise ourselves day and night, till the fire kindle in our bosoms, and we burst forth in acclamations and Hosannahs to our adorable Emmanuel. Say, ye who have ever been so occupied, whether such "meditations be not sweet;"

[b] Ps. xliii. 4.

sweet;" and whether "your souls have not been satisfied as with marrow and fatness," when you have been so employed?]

3. To commit our every concern to his disposal—

[Our duty in this respect may not unfitly be illustrated by the confidence which passengers in a ship place in a skilful pilot and an able commander. They trust their persons and their property to the pilot without any anxious cares or painful apprehensions. Conscious of their own incapacity to navigate the ship, they presume not to interfere in the management of the vessel, but leave the whole concern to those whose province it is to conduct it. Whatever storms may arise, they look to him who is at the helm to steer the vessel to its destined port. Thus does the Believer commit his way unto the Lord. To God he looks as ordering every thing for his good, yea, as having, if we may so speak, a community of interest with him, and as pledged to bring him in safety to the harbour where he would be. If any anxious thought arise, he checks it; and "casts all his care on Him, who careth for him." This we should do in reference to every concern whatever. In relation to temporal things, we should have no more anxiety than the fowls of the air, which subsist from day to day on the bounty of their Creator[c]: and even in reference to the soul, the same entire confidence must be placed in God, who has engaged to carry on and perfect in his people the work he has begun[d]. Let us not however be misunderstood to say, that we are to put away a *jealous* fear of *ourselves: that* we must retain even to the end of our lives: but an *unbelieving* fear of *God*, as either unable or unwilling to save us, we must cast it off with abhorrence, and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."]

The promises annexed to these several injunctions shew,

II. What God will do for us—

Truly he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think—

1. He will supply our wants—

[Great and urgent they may be, even like those with which Israel was oppressed on different occasions in the land of Canaan: but God will interpose for us in the hour of need, so that "verily we shall be fed." Under the pressure of their troubles, many Jews deserted their own land, and sought for security or plenty among their heathen neighbours: thus they rather fled from trouble, than looked to God, as they should have done, to relieve them from it. We must not act thus: we must not desert our post because of difficulties which we meet with in it; but

[c] Matt. vi. 25—34. [d] Phil. i. 6.

but must expect from God all those supplies of grace and strength which we stand in need of. "He that believeth, will not make haste:" he will not presently despond, because he sees not how his wants are to be supplied; but will remember, that, as "the earth, and the fulness thereof, is the Lord's," so there is all fulness of spiritual blessings also treasured up for him in Christ, and he will look to Christ for daily communications, according as his necessities may require. The Lord did not give to Elijah a store of provision that should suffice for months to come, but sent him bread and meat twice a day by the ministration of ravens, and afterwards a daily supply from the widow's cruse. In the same manner will he impart a sufficiency of temporal and spiritual blessings to all who trust in him; and "according to their day, so their strength shall be." "The soul that trusts in Him shall want no manner of thing that is good."]

2. He will fulfil our desires—

[If our desires were after the things of time and sense, we might expect to have them withheld from us: but if they be, as the Believer's are, after God himself, we shall never be disappointed: on the contrary, the more earnest and enlarged our desire is, the more certain we are that God will fulfil and satisfy it. The more "wide we open our mouth," the more assured we are that "he will fill it." "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will help them." Do we desire increasing "views of his glory? He will put us into the cleft of the rock, and make all his goodness to pass before our eyes[e]." Do we desire more intimate and abiding communion with him? He will "come and dwell in us, and walk in us, and be altogether our God[f]." Do we desire a more entire conformity to him? He will "transform us into his image from glory to glory," by the sanctifying influence of his Holy Spirit[g]. There shall not be a thing that we can ask, but he will give it us, if only it will be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfare[h].]

3. He will give a happy issue to all our concerns—

[There may be many difficulties in our way, and such as shall be to all appearance insurmountable; but He who made a path through the Red Sea, will remove them all in due time. Whatever in his wisdom he sees to be best for us, "he will bring it to pass." We may labour under many discouragements by reason of calumnies which are circulated respecting us: the world may represent us as enthusiasts that "turn the world upside down," as deceivers that are seeking some base ends of our own, as abettors of sedition, and enemies to civil government; in a word, they may speak of us as "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring

[e] Exod. xxxiii. 18—23. [f] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [g] 2 Cor. iii. 18.
[h] John xv. 7. & 1 John v. 14, 15. with Ps. xxi. 1, 2.

scouring of all things;" but God will not leave us to sink under these reproaches: he will sooner or later appear for us, and "make our righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day." We shall have "good report to pass through, as well as evil report;" and our very demeanor under our persecutions shall carry conviction to the minds of many, that we are indeed the sons of God[i]. At all events, if not before, at least at the day of judgment, our reproach shall be rolled away, and "we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father[k]."]

REFLECTIONS. See from hence,

1. What they lose who are ignorant of God—

[All that is implied either in the precepts or the promises of our text is altogether unknown to those who experience not the power of religion in their hearts. Whatever burthens they have, are borne upon their own shoulders: they know not what it is to cast them upon the Lord. Hence, when oppressed with heavy trials, they faint and sink under them; and for want of the consolations and supports of religion, they not unfrequently meditate, and sometimes also carry into execution, the awful act of suicide. O that men did but know what provision there is made for them in the Gospel of Christ! In, and with Christ, there is all that we can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity———— Only let us seek to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his Spirit, and to live altogether by faith on him; and we shall find such rich supplies, such heavenly consolations, such a fulness of all spiritual and eternal blessings, as shall far surpass all that the carnal eye has ever seen, and all that the carnal imagination has ever conceived[l].]

2. What they enjoy who live nigh to God—

[Contemplate the state of those who are now in heaven; how free from care, and how completely happy in the fruition of their God! Such in a measure may our state be even in this present world. Those who believe in Christ are privileged to rejoice in him, yea, and many do "rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and glorified." By committing themselves, and all their concerns, to him, "their very *thoughts*, which are naturally as fluctuating as the wind, are established[m]." O Believers, live not below your privileges: carry every thing to your adorable Saviour, and expect from him all that infinite love can give, and all that omnipotence can effect. "All things are yours, if ye are Christ's;" even "death itself, as well as life, is among your treasures[n]:" and soon shall all the glory and felicity of heaven be your unalienable and everlasting possession.]

[i] Matt: xxvii. 54. [k] Matt. xiii. 43. [l] 1 Cor. ii. 9.
[m] Prov. xvi. 3. [n] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

## CCCLVIII.

### THE SECURITY OF THE UPRIGHT SOUL.

Ps. xxxvii. 31. *The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide.*

THE blessedness of the righteous is a favourite subject with the sweet singer of Israel: several of his psalms are occupied with it throughout; and often in a way of immediate contrast with the state of the ungodly. As far as respects the outward appearance indeed, the advantage is often on the side of the wicked[a]: but on a fuller view of their respective states, there will be found the most abundant cause to congratulate the saints even in their lowest condition, so infinitely superior is their lot to that of the most prosperous of ungodly men[b]. The ungodly, walking after the imagination of their own hearts, have "their way dark and slippery," so that, sooner or later, they are sure to "fall" and "perish[c]:" but the "righteous," having their minds intent upon true wisdom, "are preserved, whilst the seed of the wicked are cut off[d]." "The law of God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide."

From these words we shall be led to shew,

I. The character of the righteous—

"The law of God is in his heart." It was not there by nature; for though it was originally inscribed on the heart of Adam in paradise[e], and traces of it are yet to be found on the hearts even of the benighted heathen[f]; yet is it so far effaced from the heart of the natural man, that he neither does nor will yield any subjection to it[g]. But,

God has engraven it on his heart—

[The express promise of God to all who embrace the new covenant is, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts[h]." And this promise he fulfils, through the all-powerful operation of his Holy Spirit upon their souls. As he caused Moses to come up to him on Mount Horeb with tables of stone,

[a] ver. 1. [b] ver. 16. [c] Ps. xxxv. 6—8. with ver. 13—15, 20.
[d] ver. 27, 28, 30. [e] Gen. i. 27. [f] Rom. ii. 15.
[g] Rom. viii. 7. [h] Jer. xxxi. 33.

stone, on which with his own finger he wrote the law, so he causes the believing penitent to come up to him with his heart of stone; and then, exchanging it for an heart of flesh, he inscribes upon it his law, even, as the Apostle says, upon the fleshly tables of his heart[i]. We are told respecting all the Lord's people, that they are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ[k]:" and in this their conformity to him pre-eminently appears: that, as He could say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart[l]," and as he was typically represented by the ark in which the law was deposited[m], so these have the law treasured up in their souls; and they delight in it, as their ever-faithful monitor, and infallible directory[n]. From the time that it is deposited there, they regard it *solely, constantly,* and *without reserve.* Formerly the opinions of men, or the dictates of flesh and blood, formed their rule of action: now no inquiry is made, but, "What saith the Lord?"———— Nor is it on great emergencies only that this inquiry is instituted, but at all times and on all occasions——— Nor are consequences any longer regarded. If a furnace or den of lions be prepared as the recompense of fidelity, he says, "None of these things move me:" I shall "hearken unto none but God" himself———]

This forms his distinguishing character—

[Others have the law of God in their *head,* and not unfrequently in their *mouth* also: but he alone has it in his *heart.* There may be amongst the ungodly as comprehensive a knowledge of theology as of any other science, if taken in a mere speculative view: but this is widely different from a spiritual apprehension of God's law, and a conformity of mind and will to it: *this* pertains to him only who has it written on his heart by the Spirit of God: for so the Prophet informs us: "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, *the people in whose heart is my law*[o]." To know, in a speculative way, how a sinner is to be made righteous before God, will consist with the grossest impiety: but the having of God's law in the heart infallibly designates, and proves, us the people of the Lord. There is in this respect the same difference between the nominal and the real Christian as there was formerly between different adherents to the Mosaic law. "All were not Israel who were of Israel[p]." The proudest Pharisees would "bind the law of God upon their hands, and wear it as frontlets between their eyes:" but the godly alone fulfilled the true intent of that ordinance, by "laying up God's words in their heart and in their soul[q]." So now "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which

[i] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. with 2 Cor. iii. 3.
[k] Rom. viii. 29.
[l] Ps. xl. 8.
[m] Deut. x. 2, 5.
[n] Ps. i. 2.
[o] Isai. li. 7.
[p] Rom. ix. 6.
[q] Deut. xi. 18.

which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of man, but of God[r]." In other words, he only is truly righteous, who can say with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man;" and amidst all the temptations of the flesh, "with my mind I serve the law of God[s]."]

In connexion with their character, we are led to contemplate,

II. Their security—

"None of their steps shall slide." Of this they may be assured: for a stability is, and shall be, given them, that shall preserve them amidst all temptations; a stability arising,

1. Partly, from the very character which they possess—

["The law of God being in their hearts," *they will not unnecessarily venture themselves in slippery places.* How many fall a prey to the tempter by presuming upon their strength, when, like Joseph, they should rather have fled from the scene of temptation! It is by going fearlessly to the utmost verge of what is lawful, that thousands perish[t]. The inquiry of a truly pious soul will be, not, "Is this thing lawful?" but, "Is it expedient also?" and, if the place, or scene, or gratification be calculated, either in itself or in its circumstances, to ensnare his soul, he will keep at a distance from it: for, whilst he is praying daily to God, "Lead us not into temptation," he accounts it folly and impiety to rush unnecessarily into temptation of his own accord. This cautious deportment tends greatly to the preservation of the godly, and to "keep them from defiling their garments" in this polluted world[u].

Moreover, *they are looking to this law to direct their steps.* They "have hid it within their hearts, on purpose that they may not sin against God[x]:" but to what purpose have they deposited it there, if they do not consult it? or "wherewith shall they cleanse their way, but by taking heed thereto according to God's word[y]?" Whatever then they are solicited to do, they bring it to this touchstone, and try it "by the law and the testimony." If they find not the precept clear, they hesitate: and, if they find not the footsteps of Christ and his Apostles, they pause. They know, that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin:[z]" and, till they can see their way clear, and be "thoroughly persuaded in their own mind," they will not proceed[a]; lest they lay a stumbling-block

[r] Rom. ii. 28, 29. [s] Rom. vii. 22, 25.
[t] '*Licitis perimus omnes*' has long been a proverb in the Church.
[u] Rev. iii. 4. [x] Ps. cxix. 11. [y] Ps. cxix. 9,
[z] Rom. xiv. 23. [a] ib. ver. 5.

block in the way of others, and bring guilt upon their own souls[b].

I may add further, that they will pray unto God to guide them. They know their privilege: they know that God has said, that, if they call upon him for direction, "they shall hear a word behind them," saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it;" when without such a direction "they would have turned to the right hand or to the left[c]." They therefore in every difficulty betake themselves to prayer; and experience the truth of that promise, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way[d]."]

2. Principally, from the care and fidelity of God—

[God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints[e]," and that "none of their steps shall slide:" and this promise he does, and will, fulfil. He fulfils it to them in a variety of ways. He "takes them, as a mother does her little child, by their hand, and guides them in their way[f]:" and, when they are weak, "he strengthens them with might in their inward man[g]:" and, when they would otherwise fall, he upholds them with his own almighty arms; agreeably to that express promise which he has given them; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[h]." Thus is fulfilled that promise which is contained within a few verses of our text, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand[i]." We may wonder whence it is that the people of God in all ages have been enabled to maintain their stedfastness in such trying circumstances: but the true reason is, to be found in that inviolable engagement which God has entered into, that "they should hold on their way, and that their hands should wax stronger and stronger[k]:" and this promise he has fulfilled to them, giving them "strength according to their day[l]," and enabling them "to do all things through his strength communicated to them[m]."]

Hence then we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that so many professors of religion dishonour their high and holy calling—

[It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness are a disgrace to their profession — — — And by their falls they bring the very truth of God into disrepute. But whence is it that their walk is so inconsistent? Is it from any want of power or

[b] 1 Cor. viii. 11—13. [c] Isai. xxx. 21. [d] Ps. xxv. 9.
[e] 1 Sam. ii. 9. [f] Hos. xi. 3.
[g] Eph. iv. 16. Col. i. 11. [h] Isai. xli. 10.
[i] ver. 23, 24. [k] Job xvii. 9. [l] Deut. xxxiii. 25.
[m] Phil. iv. 13.

or fidelity in God to keep them? No: it arises from this; that they have taken up a profession upon false and insufficient grounds: they have got the law in their *heads*, and in their *mouths*, but have never truly received it into their *hearts*. None will shew more zeal for the tenets they have embraced than they, or talk more fluently respecting them: but they have never been "cast into the mould of the Gospel." Their sentiments have been altered; but their hearts are unchanged; or, if changed at all, it is only in that they have adopted the *spiritual* lusts of pride and conceit, and false confidence, in the place of the *carnal* lusts of worldliness and uncleanness; or, it may be, they have *added the former to the latter*, affecting only the concealment of former evils, and not the utter extirpation of them. What then is to be expected from such persons, but that they will dishonour their profession? From such roots nothing can be hoped for, but bitter fruits. But let not the blame be cast upon religion. "They have a name to live, but they are dead." If ever they had received the law of God into their hearts, it would have produced its due effect upon their lives; and not upon the outward deportment only, but on every temper and disposition of their minds. Religion is, and must be, the same in all ages: if it transformed the saints of other days into the image of their God in righteousness and true holiness, it will do so still: and, if the conduct of any who profess it be unworthy of their high calling, let the blame attach where it ought, not on religion, but on those who make an hypocritical profession of it. Only let the law be in the heart, and we have no fear of the fruits that will appear in the life.]

2. How inseparable is the union between duty and privilege—

[The self-depending formalist who dreads the mention of privilege, and the Antinomian professor who hates the mention of duty, are equally remote from the truth of God. Depend on God we must; for it is he who must work all our works in us. And obey his law we must: for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Neither can supersede the other. To the Antinomian then I say, "Let the word of God abide in you; and "let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom." And to the Formalist I say, Look unto God to begin, and carry on, the whole work of grace in your hearts; for without him you can do nothing. Let both of you know, that both confidence in God, and obedience to him, are necessary: it is only by a reliance on him that you can obtain strength for obedience; and it is only by obedience that you can prove the sincerity of your faith and love. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man attempt to put asunder."]

## CCCLIX.

### DAVID'S DISTRESS AND CONSOLATION.

Ps. xxxviii. 1—9. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure: for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a lothesome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble, and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.*

IT will be of great use to us through life to treasure up in our minds the dealings of God with us on some particular occasions. As his care over us in our difficulties may well call for "a stone of remembrance, which shall be called our Eben-ezer," so his merciful attention to us at the first commencement of our humiliation before him may well be written in indelible characters upon our hearts. The prophet Jeremiah, looking back to some season of peculiar distress, records his experience in terms of lively gratitude[a]: and, in like manner, David opens to us all his views and feelings when he sought the Lord after a season of darkness and distress; and he tells us that this psalm was written by him "to bring to remembrance" the troubles he then endured, and the tender mercies of God towards him.

From the part we have just read, we shall be led to consider,

I. His distress—

This was exceeding great.—Let us notice,

1. The source and cause of it—

[He traces it to sin as its proper cause[b]: and sin is the true and only source of all trouble ———Sin is an object of God's abhorrence; and wherever it exists unlamented and dominant, he will

[a] Lam. iii. 1—4, 12, 13, 17—21. [b] ver. 3, 4, 5.

will visit it according to its desert. In whomsoever it be found, whether he be a king on his throne, or a beggar on a dunghill, he will make no difference, except indeed to punish it in proportion to the light that has been resisted, and the aggravations with which it has been committed. Doubtless the sins of David were of most transcendent enormity, and therefore might well be visited with peculiar severity: but we must not imagine that his are the only crimes that deserve punishment: disobedience to God, whether against the first or second table of the Law, is hateful in his sight, and will surely subject us to his "hot displeasure"———]

2. The extent and depth of it—

[His *soul* was overwhelmed with a sense of God's wrath. "God's arrows" pierced his inmost soul: and his hand was heavy upon him, and "pressed him sore." His iniquities, which, when they were yet only committed in desire and purpose, appeared light, now were an insupportable burthen to his soul; insomuch that "he roared by reason of the disquietness of his heart." Here then we see what sinners may expect in this life. Verily such experience as this is little else than a foretaste of hell itself———]

But his *body* also was afflicted with a grievous disease, which had been sent of God as an additional mark of his righteous indignation[c]. And no doubt, if we could certainly discover the reasons of the Divine procedure, we should often see diseases and death inflicted as the chastisement of sin[d]. David viewed his disorders in this light: and those, without any additional load, were heavy to be borne; but, when added to the overwhelming troubles of his soul, they almost sunk him to despair. Let those who think lightly of sin, view this monarch in the state above described, and say, whether sin, however "sweet in the mouth, be not at last the gall of asps within us[e]:" yes, assuredly, it will sooner or later "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder."]

But in the midst of all this trouble, he makes mention of,

II. His consolation—

Whilst deeply bemoaning his sin, he was assured that God was privy to all the workings of his soul, beholding his desires, and hearing all his groans. Now this was a great consolation to him, because he well knew,

1. That God, in the groanings of a penitent, recognizes the voice of his own eternal Spirit—

[Groans

[c] ver. 3, 5, 7. [d] 1 Cor. xi. 30. [e] Job xx. 12—14.

[Groans are the natural expressions of inward pain and anguish; and when they arise from a sense of sin, they are indications of a penitent heart. But no pious disposition is found in man till it is planted there by the Holy Ghost. God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," and must "give us to will, no less than to do" whatever is acceptable in his sight. As for groanings on account of sin, they are more especially said to be the fruits of the Spirit, who thus "helpeth our infirmities, and enables us to express our feelings which are too big for utterance[f]." To *man* such inarticulate sounds would convey no distinct idea; but *God* understands them perfectly, because "he knoweth the mind of the Spirit:" and he delights in them, because it is in this way that "the Spirit maketh intercession for us," and because these very intercessions are "according to the will of God[g]."

What a consolatory thought is this to one that is overwhelmed with a sense of sin! "He knows not what to pray for as he ought;" and perhaps the load upon his spirit disables him for uttering what his unembarrassed judgment would dictate: but he recollects that God needeth not any one to interpret to him our desires: he understands a sigh, a tear, a look, with infallible certainty: he sees all the self-lothing and self-abhorrence that is contained in such expressions of the penitent's feelings; and in answer to them, he will "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."]

2. That to such expressions of penitence all the promises of God are made—

[It is not to the fluent tongue, but to the contrite heart, that pardon and peace are promised. "To this man will I look," says God, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit," "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones[h]." He will fulfil not the requests only, but the *desire* also, of them that fear him," and "of them that *hope* in his mercy." If only we *look* unto him we shall be lightened," yea, we shall "be saved with an everlasting salvation[i]." The publican who dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote on his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner! went down to his house justified, when the self-applauding Pharisee was dismissed under the guilt of all his sins.

Now this is an unspeakable consolation to the weary and heavy-laden sinner. Had he to look for grounds of worthiness, or even for any considerable attainments, in himself, he would be discouraged; but finding that the invitations of God are made to him as wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked, and that

[f] Rom. viii. 26. [g] ib. ver. 27. [h] Isai. lvii. 15. & lxvi. 2.
[i] Ps. cii. 17, 19, 20. Isai. xlv. 17, 22.

that the promises are suited to him *in that state*, he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, and finds rest and peace unto his soul.]

From this view of the Psalmist's experience we see,

1. What an evil and bitter thing sin is—

["Fools will make a mock at sin," and represent it as a light and venial thing: but let any one look at David in the midst of all the splendor of a court, and say, what sin is, which could so rob him of all earthly pleasure, and bring such torment upon his soul. Was that a light matter? If we will not be convinced by such a sight as this, we shall learn it by sad experience in the eternal world, where the worm that will prey upon our consciences shall never die, and the fire that shall torment our bodies shall never be quenched. O that we might be instructed, ere it be too late!]

2. What an enviable character is the true Christian, even when viewed under the greatest disadvantages—

[We cannot conceive a Christian in circumstances less enviable than those of David in the passage before us: yet compare him with an ungodly or impenitent man under the most favourable circumstances that can be imagined, and ask, Whose views are most just?———whose feelings most rational?———whose prospects most happy?———With the one "God is angry every day;" on the other he looks with complacency and delight: the joys of the one will soon terminate in inconceivable and everlasting misery; and the sorrows of the other in endless and unspeakable felicity[k]. The sinner in the midst of all his revellings has an inward witness of the truth of our Lord's assertion; "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."]

3. Of what importance it is to attain just views of the character of God—

[If God be viewed as a God of all mercy, we shall never repent us of our sins: and if he be viewed as an inexorable Judge, we shall be equally kept from penitence by despair. But let him be seen as he is in Christ Jesus, a "God reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them," let him be acknowledged as "a just God and yet a Saviour," and instantly will a holy fear spring up in the place of presumption, and hope dispel the baneful influence of despondency.

Know then, Beloved, that this is the very character of God as he is revealed in his Gospel: he is "just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus:" he is to the impenitent indeed "a consuming fire:"

[k] Luke xvi. 19—26. & Isai. xxxv. 10.

fire:" but, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let the groaning penitent then look up to him with cheerful hope; yea, with assured confidence, that God will not despise even the lowest expressions of penitential sorrow: however "bruised the reed may be, the Lord Jesus will not break it; nor will he quench the smoking flax," though there be in it but one spark of grace, and a whole cloud of corruption: never did he yet "despise the day of small things;" "nor will he ever cast out the least or meanest that come unto him." Only come to him in faith, and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you."]

## CCCLX.

### THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Ps. xxxix. 4, 5. *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee! verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*

THERE is nothing more painful to a pious mind than to see how generally religion is neglected and despised. A godly man delights to speak of the things which are nearest to his heart: but he is often constrained to be silent, lest he should only induce the persons whose welfare he would promote, to blaspheme God, and to increase thereby their own guilt and condemnation. Gladly would he benefit all around him: but in many cases he perceives, that the very attempt to do so would be to "cast pearls before swine." In tenderness to them therefore, as well as from a regard to his own feelings, he imposes a restraint upon himself in their presence, and "refrains even from good words," though it is a pain and a grief to him to do so. Such was David's situation when he penned this psalm. He was grieved to think that rational and immortal beings, standing on the very verge of eternity, should act so irrational a part: and not finding vent for his feelings amongst men, he poured them out before God in the words which we have just read; and intreated, that, however careless others were about the con-

cerns of eternity, he might be more deeply and abidingly impressed with them.

Wishing that your minds may be suitably affected with this all-important subject, I will set before you,

I. David's estimate of man's present state—

He acknowledges that he himself could form but a very inadequate notion respecting it—

[Speculatively indeed, he knew well enough, that man's days are but few at all events, and quite uncertain as to their continuance: but the deep, and practical, and influential sense of it he had not in any degree equal to its importance; nor could he impress it on his own soul, without the powerful assistance of God's holy Spirit. Hence he poured forth this earnest petition to his God, "Lord, make me to know my end! make me to know how frail I am!"

It is thus with us also. Speculatively, the most ignorant amongst us has as perfect a knowledge of the subject as the most learned: but, practically, no one knows it, unless he have been taught of God: and even those who have "heard and learned it of the Father," need to be taught it more deeply from day to day.

That *children* do not reflect upon it, we do not wonder, because of the vanity of their minds, and their almost entire want of serious consideration. But when *persons* are *grown to maturity*, we might well expect them to feel so obvious a truth. They see that multitudes are cut off at their age; and they know that with the termination of the present life all opportunities of preparing for eternity must cease: yet they not only do not lay these considerations to heart, but they will not hear of them, or endure to have them presented to their view. Nor are *those who are more advanced in life* at all more thoughtful on this subject. Engaged in worldly business, and occupied in providing for their families, they put the thoughts of eternity as far from them as they did amidst the more pleasurable pursuits of youth. And even *when they attain to old age*, they are as far from realizing the expectations of death and judgment as ever. They know, in a speculative way, that they are nearer to the grave than they were in early life, and that they may at no distant period expect a change. But still these views are no more influential on their minds than they were at any former period of their lives. A condemned criminal, who has but a few days to live, *feels* that every hour brings him nearer to the time appointed for his execution: but not so the man who is bowed down with years: the very habit of living puts at an indefinite distance the hour of death; and days and months pass on without ever bringing at all nearer to his apprehensions the time of his dissolution. Even *the sick*

labour

labour under the same mental blindness. They attend to the fluctuations of their disorder; and one single symptom of convalescence does more to remove the expectation of death from them, than many proofs of augmented debility do to bring it home to their feelings with suitable apprehensions: they are still buoyed up with hopes from the skill of their medical attendant, when all around them see that they are sinking fast into the grave. Whatever be a man's age or state, it is God, and God alone, that can "make him thoroughly to know and feel how frail he is."]

Nevertheless the view here given us is truly just—

[The life of man is so short, as to be really "nothing before God." The comparison of it to "an hand-breadth" is peculiarly deserving of our attention; because by that image every man has, placed as it were before his eyes, "the measure of his days:" he cannot look upon his hand without calling to mind how frail he is, and how soon his present state of existence must come to an end. Let him divide his life into the periods of youth, manhood, and old age; and let him in his own apprehension divide his measure also; and it will bring to his imagination, in a very forcible way, the truth which he is so backward to contemplate. A great variety of other images are used in Scripture to convey this truth: life is compared to a shuttle which passes quickly through the loom[a]: to a ship, which soon passes away, and leaves no trace behind it: to an eagle, which, with the rapidity of lightning, hasteth to its prey[b]: but the image in our text is more striking than them all; because whilst it is peculiarly simple, it is also practical, embodied, portable. Not that any image is sufficient to paint the shortness and uncertainty of life in its true colours; for "before God, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day[c]," it is absolutely "as nothing."

As far as words can describe the state of man, truly the Psalmist has done it in our text. "*Man* is vanity;" not only vain, but *vanity itself*. "*Every* man" is so: not only the poor and ignorant, but the rich and learned: as it is said, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity[d]." And this they are "*in their best state;*" even in the vigour of youth, and in the midst of all the pleasures and honours that their hearts can wish. And they are so "*altogether*," both in mind and body; for their body is "crushed before the moth;" and in respect of mind, they are, *as far as spiritual things are concerned*, "like the wild ass's colt." This description may appear exaggerated: but it is true: yes, "*verily*," things are so, whether

[a] Job vii. 6, 7.
[b] Job ix. 25, 26.
[c] 2 Pet. iii. 8.
[d] Ps. lxii. 8.

whether we will believe it or not: and if any deny it, our answer is, "Let God be true; but every man a liar."]

Such being the real state of man, I will endeavour to shew you,

II. The vast importance of being duly impressed with it—

It was the want of this knowledge that made the adversaries of David so proud and contemptuous: and it was from a conviction of these truths that David was led so deeply to bewail their infatuation. A due consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of life would be of infinite service,

1. To diminish our anxieties about the things of time—

[We should think but little of our pleasures, or riches, or honours, if we considered how short a time they would continue, and that they may all vanish, together with life itself, the very next hour. Examples in abundance there are, in every age and place, to shew the extreme vanity of all that the world calls good and great. It is not in the Bible only that we see those who promised themselves years wherein to enjoy their newly-acquired wealth, cut short, and called in an instant to their great account: we see it continually before our eyes: the messenger of death is sent to many, who think of their end as little as any of us can do; and the sentence, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," is executed without any previous notice or expectation. If it be thought that still, if not in their own persons, yet in their heirs, they enjoy the things for which they have laboured; I answer, that they are often deprived of those very heirs, on whose aggrandisement they had set their hearts; and are constrained to leave their wealth to others who are comparative strangers to them. Moreover, supposing their destined heir to succeed to their wealth, they little know what effect it may have upon him, and whether he may not dissipate it all in a tenth part of the time that it took them to amass it. Solomon mentions this as a very great drawback upon human happiness: "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewn myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity[e]." It is probable that Solomon saw how weak his son Rehoboam was: and certainly, of all the instances that ever

[e] Eccles. ii. 18, 19.

ever occurred of the vanity of human grandeur, this is the greatest: for Solomon's head was scarcely laid in the grave, before ten of the tribes out of the twelve revolted from his son, and, instead of being his subjects, became his rivals and enemies[f]: and *in the space of five years* afterwards, all the treasures, with which Solomon had enriched both his own house and the Temple of the Lord, were taken away by an invading enemy; and *brazen* shields were made by his son, to replace the *golden* shields with which the Temple had been adorned[g]. How strongly does this illustrate those words of David which immediately follow my text! "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." Assuredly, all our feelings, whether of hope or fear, whether of joy or sorrow, whether for ourselves or others, would be moderated, if only the thought of the transitoriness and uncertainty of human affairs were once duly impressed upon our minds: "those who have wives, would be as though they had none; those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; those who buy, as though they bought not; and those who use this world, as not abusing it:" the one thought, I say, how "transient every thing in this world is," would produce in us, if not an indifference to the concerns of time, yet at least a moderation in our regard for them[h].]

2. To augment our diligence in preparing for eternity—

[Who that considered the uncertainty of life, would defer the concerns of his soul, which are of more importance than ten thousand worlds. It were rather to be expected that such an one would give neither sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids, till he should have secured, beyond a possibility of doubt, the favour of his God. One would think that every hour spent in any other pursuit should be grudged by him; and that, whatever efforts were made to divert his attention to any other subject, he should say with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down[i]." With what care, under such impressions, would a person read the word of God! With what humility would he attend Divine ordinances! With what strong crying and tears would he present his supplications at the throne of Grace! How, in all that he did, would he resemble those who contended in the Olympic games, running, wrestling, fighting as for his very life! The man with the avenger of blood close at his heels would not exert himself more to reach the city of refuge, than such an one would in "fleeing from the wrath to come." It is only those who promise themselves days and months

[f] 1 Kin. xii. 16, 19.
[g] 1 Kin. xiv. 25—27.
[h] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.
[i] Neh. vi. 3.

months to come, that can sleep at their post, and dream of more convenient seasons, which may never arrive[k] — — —

In this view then I cannot too earnestly intreat you to offer, each of you for yourselves, the prayer of David, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am!" — — — And I beseech you to get his estimate of human life so graven on your hearts, that you may walk under the influence of it to the latest hour of your lives. In a word, My heart's desire and prayer to God for every one of you is, that you may be so "wise as to redeem your time," and be so taught to number your days as to apply your hearts unto wisdom[l]."]

[k] Jam. iv. 13, 14. [l] Ps. xc. 12.

## CCCLXI.

### DAVID'S SUCCESS IN PRAYER AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US.

Ps. xl. 1—3. *I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.*

THIS psalm undoubtedly refers to Christ, being expressly applied to him by an inspired Apostle; and so applied, as to have the whole weight of the Apostle's argument depending on the truth and propriety of his citation[a]. Yet it certainly refers to David also, who, in some parts of it, speaks in his own person, and, in others, in the person of the Messiah. It is in this way that the Prophetic Writings generally speak: there will be found in them a primary or historical sense, and a secondary or mystical sense; the two senses being sometimes more blended, and sometimes more distinct. Here, as in several other psalms, some parts of the psalm are more applicable to David, and others to the Messiah. To David, we conceive, the words which we have just read more immediately belong: and, as spoken by him

[a] Heb. x. 4—9.

him in his own name, they will lead me to set before you,

I. His conduct in a season of deep distress—

What the particular distress was, we are not informed. Sometimes the language which he here uses has respect to sufferings under persecution. Thus in the 69th Psalm he says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters[b]." Again, in the 142d Psalm; "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I: bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name[c]." But in the psalm before us, he speaks more particularly as under the pressure of sin: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me[d]." On this account I understand his distress to have arisen chiefly on account of sin, under a sense of which,

1. He "waited patiently *upon* the Lord"—

[He betook himself to prayer. And where should a weary and heavy-laden sinner go, but unto his God; or how should he approach his God, but in a way of humble, fervent, and continual supplication? In what manner he prayed, he tells us in another psalm: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice; let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplication! If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait; and in his word do I hope[e]." He was not like those who "pour out a prayer only when God's chastening is upon them:" he would call upon his God day and night; and never cease to wrestle with him, till he had prevailed[f].]

2. He "waited patiently *for* the Lord"—

[He well knew how often he had turned a deaf ear to the voice

[b] Ps. lxix. 1, 2, 14. [c] Ps. cxlii. 6, 7. [d] ver. 12.
[e] Ps. cxxx. 1—5. See also Ps. xxxviii. 1—6.
[f] Gen. xxxii. 26. Hos. xii. 3, 4.

voice of God; and therefore, how justly God might turn a deaf ear to him. Yet he hoped in the multitude of God's tender mercy. He came not pleading any merits of his own, nor trusting in any outward services whatever: he knew that God required not the sacrifice of bulls and of goats to expiate sin, but faith in that better sacrifice which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world; and he came pleading the merit of *that* sacrifice, and trusting that *through it* he should ultimately find acceptance[g]. However long therefore God should withhold an answer of peace, he would wait, and patiently too, without murmuring; satisfied, if, after ever so many years of continued supplication, God should at last say to him, "Fear not; thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee."]

The wisdom of this conduct may be seen in,

II. The benefit he derived from it—

God "inclined his ear to him, and heard his cry;" and, in answer to his supplications, vouchsafed to him,

1. Liberty—

[The image under which David depicts his unpardoned state is very beautiful and just. He was as one in "an horrible pit, and sunk in miry clay." Say, ye who know what it is to be shut up, as it were, under a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of God's wrath, whether any words can adequately describe the darkness, the misery, and the bondage of a soul so circumstanced? The state of Jeremiah, when cast into a dungeon, and sunk in the mire, and ready to perish with hunger[h], was distressing to flesh and blood: but what was that to a sinner shut up in hourly expectation of the wrath of an offended God? Oh! it is inexpressibly tremendous: no tongue can tell how a soul trembles, and sinks, and faints under such appalling apprehensions, as are called by the Apostle, "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume it"——— But from this state David was delivered by means of fervent and persevering prayer. Who will say that he was not well repaid for waiting, for waiting patiently *upon* the Lord, and *for* the Lord? Had his supplications been unintermitted for ten thousand years, they would have been well compensated by such an answer as this at last. And, if a promise of such an answer after such a period were given to any one that is now gone beyond redemption, we may well conceive with what ardour he would commence, and prosecute his labour through the appointed time: the very hope of deliverance at last would more than half annihilate the anguish with which despair has already overwhelmed his soul.]

2. Holi-

[g] ver. 6—11. [h] Jer. xxxviii. 6, 9, 10.

2. Holiness—

[When God, by a sense of pardoning love, "brought David up out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay," he at the same time "set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings." What that rock was, we are at no loss to determine: it was no other than "the Rock of ages," the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "a sure foundation" to all who stand upon him[i], and who will impart of his own stability to all who put their trust in him. "On this Rock the whole Church is built; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against it[k]." It is not pardon only that we obtain by union with the Lord Jesus Christ, but strength also, to walk stedfastly in the ways of God. Separate from him, we can do nothing[l]: united to him by faith, we can do all things[m]: and so established shall our hearts be by his grace, that we may defy all the powers of darkness, and already, by anticipation, enjoy our final triumph[n]. What a fruit then was here of persevering prayer! Yet so shall all who wait patiently upon their God be favoured: they shall be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."]

3. Joy—

[" A new song was now put into the mouth of David, even praise unto his God." And praise is indeed a "new" song to one who is but just brought to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: the unconverted man knows it not: he has not a heart attuned to it. He may feel somewhat of gratitude for temporal mercies; but for the communication of spiritual blessings he cannot render any cordial thanks, because he never has received them, nor ever felt his need of them. Jeremiah might be sensible of his obligations to Ebed-melech for deliverance from the dungeon, because he had a deep consciousness of the peril and misery from which he had been rescued: but without that consciousness all professions of gratitude for such a deliverance would have been absurd. And so, till we are sensible what an horrible pit we have been taken out of, we can never have our mouth filled with praises and thanksgivings to our redeeming God. But this ardent love to God and holy delight in him invariably spring out of a manifestation of God's mercy to the soul. David would praise his God every day, and all the day long: and it should seem that the greatness and the multitude of the deliverances vouchsafed to him, disposed him, beyond all other of the sons of men, to pour out his soul in acclamations and hosannahs to his God.]

What then is,

III. The

[i] Isai. xxviii. 15. [k] Matt. xvi. 18. [l] John xv. 5.
[m] Phil. iv. 13.
[n] Zech. iv. 7. Isai. xli. 14—16. Rom. viii. 35—39.

III. The mercy we should make of his experience—

St. Paul tells us, that the mercy vouchsafed to him was intended by God for the instruction and encouragement of others; for their instruction, that they might know how great was the long-suffering of God; and for their encouragement, that they from so glorious an example of mercy might learn to expect the same. Thus David, speaking of this experience of his, says, "Many shall see it, and fear, and shall put their trust in the Lord." From his experience then we may learn,

1. To use the same means—

[We are not to say, David found mercy of the Lord, therefore I may expect the same at all events; but, therefore I may expect the same in a diligent use of the same means. David feared; and therefore I must "fear:" I must fear the displeasure of my God: I must fear lest I be left in the horrible pit, and sink for ever in the mire of unforgiven sin. My fear also must be operative, stirring me up to earnest prayer, and stimulating me to "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before me." The use we are apt to make of any extraordinary displays of mercy, and which many make of the mercy vouchsafed to the penitent thief upon the cross, is to say within ourselves, God is too merciful to punish men in the eternal world: if I in a dying hour do but ask forgiveness, I also shall obtain mercy: and therefore I will not trouble myself about turning unto God, till I find, or think I find, that death is coming upon me. But let not any of us be guilty of so perverting the mercies of our God: let us "not so despise his goodness and patience and long-suffering; but let his goodness lead us to repentance." Let us say, David found deliverance by waiting patiently. I then will wait patiently also. But it was with strong crying and tears that David sought for mercy: and in that way I will seek it also. It was in these holy exercises too that he was so constant: and in them also will I be constant, and persevere unto the end, assured, that it is only by patient continuance in well-doing I can ever hope to obtain the desired benefits.]

2. To expect the same end—

[We should never imagine ourselves to be in so low a state, but that God is able to deliver us from it. If, like Jonah, we were, as to our own apprehensions, "in the belly of hell," yet from thence we should cry to him, assured that he would hear our voice, and "bring up our souls from the pit of corruption[o]." The

[o] Jon. ii. 2, 6.

The state of David was as desperate as it could well be: yet from thence was he rescued, to his unutterable joy. Hezekiah also seems to have been in a similar state, and to have experienced a similar deliverance: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back[p]." Thus shall it be with all who will seek God in sincerity and truth, especially when, like David, they seek him through the sacrifice and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their feet shall then be extricated from the mire, and set upon the Rock, where "their feet shall not slide," and from whence "they shall never be moved." And though their lives hitherto may have been spent in sighing and mourning, yet shall there be given to them "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." In a word, let them only pray in faith; and however "wide they open their mouth, it shall be filled[q]."]

[p] Isai. xxxviii. 17. [q] Ps. lxxxi. 10.

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## CCCLXII.

### CONSOLATION TO THE DISTRESSED.

Ps. xl. 17. *I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.*

THAT part of the Holy Scriptures which most fully opens the exercises of the heart is the book of Psalms. There we see a man of God unbosoming himself before his Maker, and declaring all his hopes and fears, his griefs and consolations. Sometimes he speaks in the person of the Messiah, and sometimes in his own person: sometimes his words are applicable both to the one and the other. These varieties often appear in the very same psalm; some parts of which exclusively relate to the type, or to the antitype; and other parts are common to both. It is thus in the psalm before us. That it refers to the Messiah, there can be no doubt; because it is applied to him by God himself[a]. Yet there are in it some expressions, which should rather be explained in reference to David only. The twelfth verse in particular must be understood in this way: and the circumstance of all the following verses being repeated

[a] Compare ver. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—7.

peated in another place, and formed into a distinct psalm by themselves[b], is a strong reason for referring them also to him principally, or perhaps to him alone. In the words of our text we notice,

I. His complaint—

David on some occasions was reduced to great straits and difficulties with respect to his temporal concerns: but he was also much tried in his spirit: and the complaint before us seems to have arisen from,

1. A sense of his guilt—

[In ver. 12, he speaks of "his iniquities having taken such hold upon him, that he was not able to look up; that they were more than the hairs of his head, so that his heart failed him." It is very probable that he alluded in some measure to those dreadful enormities which he had committed in the matter of Uriah. But he would not consider those actions merely as insulated and detached, but rather as indications of the extreme depravity of his heart[c]: and in reference to *that* he might well say of himself, "I am poor and needy." Indeed, who that knows any thing of the spirituality of God's law, or of his own innumerable departures from it, can use any other language than that in the text? Was Adam poor when despoiled of the Divine image through the commission of one sin; and are not we, whose iniquities are more than the hairs of our head? Was he needy, when banished from Paradise, and doomed to eternal death; and are not we, who from our very birth have been "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?" Though God has forgiven us, it does not become us to forget what we are in ourselves, but to go softly before him all our days, repenting in dust and ashes.]

2. A sense of his weakness—

[David had other enemies than those who opposed his regal authority. He complains in another psalm, "Iniquities prevail against me[d]:" and he found it exceeding difficult to subdue them. On this account also he used the expressions in the text. He felt himself poor and needy in reference to every thing that he accounted good. He lamented especially his want of wisdom, and strength, and righteousness. Hence he cried, "Open thou mine eyes;" "O give me understanding in the way of godliness!" "Hold thou me up!" "hold up my goings in thy ways, that my footsteps slip not!" "Enter not into judgment with thy

[b] Ps. lxx. [c] In this light he speaks of them in Ps. li. 5.
[d] Ps. lxv. 3.

thy servant, O Lord! for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Similar to this is the experience of all the saints. All are insufficient of themselves for any thing that is good: and the man who was stripped, and wounded, and left half dead[e], was but a faint emblem of the man who, feeling in himself innumerable corruptions, is unable to mortify so much as one of them, except as he is aided from above, and strengthened by communications of the Spirit of Grace. St. Paul himself lamented his state in reference to this; yea, he even surpassed the Psalmist in his humiliating confessions and mournful complaints[f].]

But in the midst of all this, we view with pleasure,

II. His consolation—.

He considered that God's thoughts were exercised upon him—

[God is not an inattentive observer of any of his creatures: but "his eyes are more especially upon the righteous[g]." As "his eyes were upon the Promised Land from one end of the year even to the other[h]," so are they upon his own people in every place and in every age. He says, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give you an expected end[i]." He thinks of his people with *tender compassion*—with *anxious care*—with *joyful complacency*. How tenderly did he listen to the effusions of Ephraim's sorrow[k]! With what anxiety does he sit, as a refiner, to watch the vessel which he is purifying in the furnace, lest it should by any means suffer injury by the process that was intended only for its good[l]! With what exultation too does he say, "To this man will I look, even unto him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit;" as though not all the angels in heaven could engage his attention in comparison of such a sight! David was sensible, that in the midst of all his spiritual distress he was not forgotten of his God; but that he was, notwithstanding all his unworthiness, an object of his paternal care[m].]

What comfort must such a consideration afford him!

[Surely greater consolation could scarcely be conceived than that which would arise from this source. What must it be to have *unsearchable wisdom* contriving for his good!——— *almighty power* ready to execute whatever Divine wisdom should judge expedient!——— *unbounded mercy* pleading, that his sins and frailties may not provoke God to withdraw his loving-kindness from

[e] Luke x. 30. [f] Rom. vii. 24. [g] Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. & xxxiv. 15.
[h] Job xxxvi. 7. Deut. xi. 12. [i] Jer. xxix. 11.
[k] Jer. xxxi. 18—20. & Hos. xiv. 8. [l] Mal. iii. 3.
[m] He knew it from both his past and present experience, Ps. xxxi. 7. with ver. 5.

from him! — — — and, lastly, *unchanging faithfulness* demanding on his behalf the accomplishment of all the promises! — — — The consideration of these things must of necessity check every desponding fear, and constrain him to exclaim, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God[m]." And every one who can realize this one consideration, has within himself an antidote for every fear, and a balm for every wound.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who know little of David's experience—

[The generality of those who are called Christians would be ready to despise any one who should express himself like the inspired Psalmist. They would suppose that he was under the influence of a weak deluded mind. But let them not congratulate themselves on their fancied superiority; for they only betray their own ignorance[n]. Let them rather seek to know themselves, that, being made sensible of their destitute condition, they may be made rich in Christ Jesus[o].]

2. Those whose feelings are like his—

[While you are complaining of your poverty, God is saying, "But thou art rich[p]." The truth is, that the more we are sensible of our guilt and helplessness, the more ready God is to help and deliver us: "The hungry he filleth with good things; but the rich he sends empty away." Indeed he paints the most destitute condition that can be imagined, on purpose that he may administer consolation to us under it[q]. If any then be cast down as though there were no hope, let them plead with him as David did[r]: and they shall soon find, by happy experience, that "God's thoughts and ways as far exceed ours, as the heavens are above the earth[s]."] *

[m] Ps. xlii. 11. [n] Rev. iii. 17. with Mic. iv. 12.
[o] 1 Cor. i. 30. [p] Rev. ii. 9. [q] Isai. xli. 17, 18.
[r] Ps. cxlii. 1—7.
[s] See Ps. lxxii. 12, 13. which may be illustrated by Jonah i. 6, 15. & ii. 1—10.

* If this were a subject for a *Charity Sermon*, the *Application* should be altered, and another substituted, recommending the audience to imitate God by thinking of the distresses of their fellow-creatures.

## CCCLXIII.

### DAVID'S DESIRE AFTER GOD.

Ps. xlii. 1, 2. *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

GREAT are the vicissitudes of the Christian life: sometimes the soul basks, if we may so speak, in the full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness; and at other times it feels not in any degree the cheering influence of his rays. And these variations are sometimes of shorter duration, like successive days; and at other times of longer continuance, like the seasons of the year. In David these changes were carried almost to the utmost extremes of elevation and depression, of confidence and despondency, of exultation and grief. At the time of writing this psalm he was driven from his throne by Absalom, and constrained to flee for his life beyond Jordan. There, exiled from the city and temple of his God, he stated, for the edification of the Church in all future ages, how ardently he longed for the renewed enjoyment of those ordinances, which were the delight and solace of his life. In these things he may be considered as a pattern for us: we shall therefore endeavour distinctly to mark,

I. The frame of his mind towards God—

This is described in terms peculiarly energetic; "he thirsted after God; yea, he panted after him, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks." We cannot conceive any image that could mark more strongly the intenseness of his desire, than that which is here used. A hart or deer, when fleeing from its pursuers, has naturally its mouth parched through fear and terror: but when, by its own exertions in the flight, its very blood almost boils within it, the thirst is altogether insupportable, and the creature pants, or brays, (as the expression is,) for some brook, where it may refresh its sinking frame,

and acquire strength for further exertions. Such was David's thirst after God, the living God.

His circumstances, it is true, were peculiar—

[Jerusalem was the place where God had appointed the ordinances of his worship: and David, being driven from thence, was precluded from a possibility of presenting to the Lord his accustomed offerings. This was a great distress to his soul: for though God was accessible to him in prayer, he could not hope for that measure of acceptance which he had reason to expect in an exact observance of the Mosaic ritual; nor could he hope that such manifestations would be vouchsafed to his soul, as he might have enjoyed, if he had approached God in the way prescribed by the law. Hence all his ardour might well be accounted for, since by the dispensation under which he lived his way to the Deity was obstructed, and the communications of the Deity to him were intercepted.

We acknowledge that these peculiar circumstances account for the frame of David's mind at that time.]

Nevertheless, his frame is as proper for us as it was for him—

[Though the observance of certain rites and ceremonies is no longer necessary, and God may be approached with equal ease from any spot upon the globe, yet it is no easy matter to come into his presence, and to behold the light of his countenance lifted up upon us. To bow the knees before him, and to address him in a form of words, is a service which we may render without any difficulty; but to draw nigh to the very throne of God, to open our mouths wide, and to have our hearts enlarged in prayer, to plead with God, to wrestle with him, to obtain answers of prayer from him, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day, *this*, I say, is of very difficult attainment: to do it indeed is our duty, and to enjoy it is our privilege; but there are few who can reach these heights, or, having reached them, prolong to any great extent the heavenly vision. Hence we all have occasion to lament seasons of comparative darkness and declension; and to pant with insatiable avidity after the renewed enjoyment of an absent God.]

Let us then contemplate,

II. The evidences of this frame, wherever it exists—

Such a frame of mind must of necessity be attended with correspondent efforts to attain its object. There will be in us,

1. A

1. A diligent attendance on all the means of grace—

[Where shall we look for God, but in his holy word, where he reveals to us all his majesty and his glory? That word then we shall read with care, and meditate upon it day and night, and listen to the voice of God speaking to us in it———We shall also pray over it, converting every command into a petition, and every promise into an urgent plea———The public ordinances of religion we shall highly prize, because in them more especially we honour God, and have reason to expect more abundant manifestations of his love to our souls———At the table of the Lord too we shall be found frequent guests, not only because we are required by gratitude to remember the love of Christ in dying for us, but because the Lord Jesus still, as formerly, delights to "make himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread." If we do really pant after God, I say again, we cannot but seek after him in the way of his ordinances.]

2. An acquiescence in every thing that may bring him nearer to us—

[God is pleased oftentimes to afflict his people, in order to wean them from the love of this present world, and to quicken their souls to more diligent inquiries after him. Now "affliction is not in itself joyous, but grievous:" nevertheless, when viewed in connexion with the end for which it is sent, it is welcomed even with joy and gratitude by all who are intent on the enjoyment of their God. In this view St. Paul "took pleasure in infirmities and distresses" of every kind, because they brought him to God, and God to him;—him, in a way of fervent prayer; and God, in a way of rich and abundant communication[a]. In this view, every saint that has ever experienced tribulation in the ways of God is ready to say, that "it is good for him that he has been afflicted," and that, if only God's presence may be more abidingly manifested to his soul, he is ready to suffer the loss of all things, and to count them but dross and dung.]

3. A dread of every thing that may cause him to hide his face from us—

[We know that there is in every generous heart a dread of any thing that may wound the feelings of those we love: how much more then will this exist in those who love God, and are panting after the enjoyment of him! Shall we under such a frame of mind go and do "the abominable thing which his soul hates?" shall we by any wilful misconduct "grieve the Holy Spirit of promise, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption?" No: when tempted to evil, we shall reject it with abhorrence, and say, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against

[a] 2 Cor. xii. 10.

against God?" We shall "put away every accursed thing that may trouble our camp:" we shall not only turn from open and flagrant iniquity, but shall "abstain from the very appearance of evil." We shall search for sin in the heart, as the Jews searched for leaven in their houses, in order that we may be "a new lump, altogether unleavened." We shall strive to have our every action, every word, and "every thought, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

4. A dissatisfaction of mind whenever we have not an actual sense of his presence—

[We cannot rest in a mere routine of duties: it is *God* that we seek, even the *living* God; and therefore we can never be satisfied with a *dead form*, nor with any number of forms, however multiplied. We shall look back to seasons of peculiar access to God, as the happiest periods of our life; and in the absence of God shall say, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head!" We shall deprecate the hidings of his face as the severest affliction that we can endure; and shall never feel comfort in our minds till we have regained the light of his countenance and the joy of his salvation. The conduct of the Church, in the Song of Solomon, is that which every one who truly loves the heavenly Bridegroom will observe: he will inquire after him with all diligence, and, having found him, will labour with augmented care to retain and perpetuate the expressions of his love[b].]

Let us LEARN then, from this example of David,

1. The proper object of our ambition—

[Crowns and kingdoms should not satisfy the Christian's ambition. He should seek to enjoy "God himself, even the living God," who has life in himself, and is the one source of life to the whole creation. David, when driven from his house and family, did not pant after his lost possessions, his ruined honours, his deserted relatives: it was God alone whose presence he so ardently desired. O that every desire of our souls may thus be swallowed up in God, whose loveliness and loving-kindness exceed all the powers of language to describe, or of any created imagination to conceive!]

2. The proper measure of our zeal—

[In reference to earthly attainments, men in general contend, that it is scarcely possible to have our desires too ardent: but in reference to the knowledge and the enjoyment of God, they think even the smallest ardour is misplaced. But "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" and, if the measure of David's desire was right, then should not ours stop short of

[b] Ch. iii. 1—4.

of his. When we can explore the heights and depths of the Redeemer's love, or count the unsearchable riches of his grace, then may we limit our exertions according to the scale which we may derive from them: but, if they surpass all the powers of language or of thought, then may we take the hunted deer for our pattern, and never pause till we have attained the full fruition of our God.]

## CCCLXIV.

### SOURCES AND REMEDY OF DEJECTION.

Ps. xliii. 5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

IT has pleased God to suffer many of his most eminent servants to be in trouble, and to record their experience for our benefit, that we, when in similar circumstances, may know, that we are not walking in an untrodden path, and that we may see how to demean ourselves aright. The Psalmist was conversant with afflictions of every kind. In the preceding psalm, which seems to have been penned during his flight from Absalom, he gives us a very melancholy picture of his state: "tears were his meat day and night, while his enemies gloried over him, and said continually, Where is now thy God[a]?" "His soul was cast down within him:" for while "the waves and billows threatened to overwhelm him, the water-spouts threatened to burst upon him: so that deep called unto deep[b]," to effect his ruin; and it seemed as if all the powers of heaven and earth were combined against him. In complaining of these things, he sometimes expostulates with God, "Why hast thou forgotten me[c]?" but at other times he checks himself, and, as it were, reproves his soul for its disquietude and despondency[d]. The psalm before us was evidently written on the same occasion:

[a] Ps. xlii. 3, 10.

[b] ib. ver. 6, 7. Water-spouts are very formidable to mariners, because if they burst over a ship, they will sink it instantly: and here they are represented as conspiring with the tempestuous ocean for his destruction. [c] ib. ver. 9. [d] ib. ver. 5, 11.

occasion: it contains the same complaints[e]; and ends, like the former, with a third time condemning his own impatience, and encouraging his soul to trust in God.

His words lead us to consider,

I. The sources of dejection—

It cannot be doubted but that *temporal* afflictions will produce a very great dejection of mind: for though sometimes grace will enable a person to triumph over them as of small consequence, yet more frequently our frail nature is left to feel its weakness; and the effect of grace is, to reconcile us to the dispensations of Providence, and to make them work for our good: still however, though we are *saints*, we cease not to be *men:* and it often happens, that heavy and accumulated troubles will so weaken the animal frame, as ultimately to enfeeble the mind also, and to render it susceptible of fears, to which, in its unbroken state, it was an utter stranger. The disquietude of the Psalmist himself arose in a measure from this source: and therefore we must not wonder if heavy losses, and cruel treatment from our near friends, or troubles of any other kind, should weigh down the spirits of those who have made less attainments in the divine life. But we shall confine our attention principally to *spiritual* troubles: and among these we shall find many fruitful sources of dejection:

1. Relapses into sin—

[By far the greatest part of our sorrows originates here. A close and uniform walk with God is productive of peace: but declensions from him bring guilt upon the conscience, together with many other attendant evils. And if those professors of religion who complain so much of their doubts and fears, would examine faithfully the causes of their disquietude, they might trace it up to secret neglects of duty, or to some lust harboured and indulged ———]

2. The temptations of Satan—

[Doubtless this wicked fiend is an occasion of much trouble to the people of God; else his temptations had not been characterized

[e] Compare xlii. 9. with xliii. 2.

racterized as "fiery darts[f]," which suddenly pierce and inflame the soul. We may judge in a measure how terrible his assaults are, when we see the Apostle, who was unmoved by all that man could do against him[g], crying out with such agony and distress under the buffetings of Satan[h]. We shall have a yet more formidable idea of them, if we consider that the Lord of Glory himself, when conflicting with the powers of darkness, sweat great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the agony of his soul. Can we wonder then if the saints are sometimes dejected through the agency of that subtle enemy?]

3. The hidings of God's face—

[We do not think that God *often* hides his face from men without some immediate provocation: but we dare not to say that he *never* does; because he is sovereign in the disposal of his gifts; and because he withdrew the light of his countenance from Job without any flagrant transgression on the part of his servant to deserve it. It is scarcely needful to observe, how painful that must be to those who love God; our blessed Lord, who bore the cruelties of men without a complaint, was constrained to cry out bitterly under his dereliction from his heavenly Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And certainly this is the most distressing of all events: "the spirit of a man, when strengthened from above, may sustain any infirmity; but a wounded spirit, wounded too by such a hand, who can bear[i]?"]

Having traced out the sources of dejection, let us inquire after,

II. The remedy—

The great remedy for every temporal or spiritual affliction is faith. This, and this alone, is adequate to our necessities. The efficacy of this principle for the space of three thousand six hundred years is declared in the 11th chapter to the Hebrews; toward the close of which, we are told what it enabled them to *do*[k], and what to *suffer*[l]. It was that which the Psalmist prescribed to himself as the cure of his disquietude:

1. "Hope in God"—

[We are too apt in our troubles to flee unto the creature for help[m]. But it is God who sends our troubles; ("they spring not out of the dust[n],") and he only can remove them. We should therefore look unto him, and put our trust in him. This is

[f] Eph. vi. 16. [g] Acts xx. 24. [h] 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.
[i] Prov. xviii. 14. [k] Heb. xi. 33, 34. [l] Ib. ver. 36, 37.
[m] Hos. v. 13. [n] Job v. 6.

is the direction which God himself gives us: he reminds us of his wisdom and power to over-rule our trials for good; and exhorts us, when weary and fainting to wait on him as our all-sufficient Helper[o].]

2. Expect deliverance from him—

[To what end has God given us such "exceeding great and precious promises," if we do not rest upon them, and expect their accomplishment? The refiner does not put his vessels into the furnace, to leave them there; but to take them out again when they are fitted for his use. And it is to purify us as "vessels of honour," that God subjects us to the fiery trial. We should say therefore, with Job, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold[p]." It was this expectation that supported David: "I had fainted," says he, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living[q]." We are told that "light is sown for the righteous[r]:" that is sufficient for us: between seed-time and harvest there may be a long and dreary winter; but still every day brings forward the appointed time of harvest; and the husbandman waiteth in an assured expectation of its arrival[s]. Thus must we wait, however long the promise may seem to tarry[t]: and as those who are now in heaven were once in great tribulation like ourselves[u], so shall we in due season be with them freed from all remains of sin and sorrow. In our darkest hours we should hold fast this confidence, "I shall yet praise him[x]."]

3. View him in his covenant-relation to you—

[It is observable, that our Lord, in the midst of his dereliction, addressed his Father, "*My* God! *my* God!" Now thus should *we* do. God is the God of all his people; yea, he dwells in them[y], and is, as it were, the very life of their souls[z]. However distressed then we be, we should regard him as "the health of our countenance and our God." What a foundation of hope did the remembrance of God's paternal relation to them afford to the Church of old[a]! And what a sweet assurance does God himself teach *us* also to derive from the same source[b]! If we unfeignedly desire to be his, we have good reason to believe that we are his: and if we be his, he will never suffer any to pluck us out of his hand[c]. Hold fast this therefore, as an anchor of the soul; and it shall keep you stedfast amidst all the storms and tempests that can possibly assail you.]

ADDRESS.

[o] Isai. xl. 28—31.
[p] Job xxiii. 10.
[q] Ps. xxvii. 13.
[r] Ps. xcvii. 11.
[s] Jam. v. 7.
[t] Hab. ii. 3.
[u] Rev. vii. 14
[x] Compare Ps. cxviii. 17, 18. with the text.
[y] 2 Cor. vi. 16.
[z] Col. iii. 4.
[a] Isai. lxiii. 15, 16.
[b] Isai. xlix. 14—16.
[c] John x. 27, 28.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are in a drooping desponding frame—

[We cannot give you better counsel than that suggested by the example of David.

*Inquire*, first, *into the reasons of your disquietude*. If it proceed from temporal afflictions, recollect, that they are rather tokens of God's love, than of his hatred; for "whom he loveth he chasteneth[d]." If it arise from the temptations of Satan, take not *all* the blame to yourselves; but cast a good measure of it at least on him from whom they proceed. If you are troubled about the hidings of God's face, intreat him to return, and to lift up upon you once more the light of his countenance. And if, as is most probable, "your own sins have hid his face from you," humble yourself for them, and implore his grace that you may be enabled henceforth to mortify and subdue them. At all events, having once searched out the cause, you will know the better how to apply a remedy.

But, in the next place, it will be proper to *check these desponding fears*. The text is not a mere inquiry, but an expostulation; and such an expostulation as you should address to your own souls. For, what benefit can accrue from such a frame? It only weakens your hands, and discourages your heart, and dishonours your God. We do not say that there are not just occasions for disquietude: but this we say, that instead of continuing in a dejected state, you should return instantly to God, who would "give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness[e]."

But, above all, "*encourage yourself in God*." This is what David did in the text, and on another most memorable occasion[f]. And while there is an all-sufficient God on whom to rely, you need not fear though earth and hell should be combined against you[g].]

2. Those who are entire strangers to disquietude and dejection—

[We are far from congratulating you on your exemption from such feelings as these. On the contrary, we would propose to you, *in reference to that exemption*, the very same things as we recommended to others in reference to their distresses.

First, *inquire into the reason* of your never having experienced such feelings. "Why art thou NOT cast down, O my soul? and why art thou NOT disquieted within me?" Does it not proceed from an ignorance of your own state, and from an unconcern about that account which you must soon give of yourself at the judgment-seat of Christ? ———

Next,

[d] Heb. xii. 6. [e] Isai. lxi. 3. [f] 1 Sam. xxx. 1—6.
[g] Ps. xi. 1, 4. & xxvii. 1, 3. & cxxv. 1.

Next, *expostulate with yourself;* "O my soul, why art thou thus callous and insensible? Will not thy contempt of God's judgments issue in thy ruin?——It must not, it shall not be: thou hast neglected thine eternal interests long enough: thou shalt, God helping thee, bend thine attention to them from this time: for if thou be summoned before thy God in thy present state, it had been better for me that I had never been born."

But you also, no less than the disconsolate, must *found your hopes on God.* All your expectation must be from Him "with whom there is mercy, and plenteous redemption." If you will but turn to him in earnest, you have nothing to fear: for his word to you is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."]

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## CCCLXV.

### BENEFITS ATTENDANT ON HOLINESS.

Ps. xlv. 7. *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

THIS psalm is a nuptial song; wherein Christ, as the heavenly Bridegroom, is celebrated by his Bride, the Church; and she also is commended by him as worthy of the union proposed between them. In the former part, the glory and excellency of Jesus are set forth in a variety of views. In the verse before the text, he is addressed as the supreme "God, whose throne is for ever and ever;" while, as man, he is acknowledged to have received his glory and felicity from the Father, as the reward of his unparalleled virtues. This is undoubtedly the primary sense of the words before us. But they may also be considered as containing a general truth, expressive of God's regard for holiness, and of those testimonies of his approbation which all godly people shall enjoy.

Let us then turn our attention to them,

I. As applicable to Christ—

That they refer to him there can be no doubt; because

because in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is expressly affirmed that they were addressed to him[a].

To him the character transcendently belongs—

[*In his doctrine*, he removed the false glosses with which the Jewish Doctors had obscured the law, and established its authority over the motions of the heart as well as the actions of the life[b]. He laid the axe at the very root of sin; and gave a system of morality more pure and perfect than the united wisdom of the whole world had been ever able to devise.

*In his life*, "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Neither his friends who were most intimate with him, nor his enemies who were most inveterate against him, could ever find the smallest flaw or blemish in his conduct. God himself repeatedly attests that "in him was no sin."

But most of all *in his death* did our blessed Lord approve himself a lover of righteousness and a hater of iniquity: for he died in order to expiate the guilt of sin: yea, he came down from heaven on purpose to atone for it by his blood; and to mark in indelible characters its malignity, by the very means which he used to deliver us from its curse.

*In the whole scope of the economy which he introduced*, he manifested the same righteous disposition: for at the same time that he commissioned his Apostles to go forth and evangelize all nations, he bade them "teach their proselytes to observe and do whatsoever he had commanded." His Gospel, while it "brings salvation to men, teaches them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world:" and the Ministers who are sent forth to proclaim it, are "sent to bless men, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities."]

On this account God in a super-eminent degree "anointed him with the oil of gladness"—

[The Father "gave not the Spirit by measure unto him," even during the time of his ministration upon earth[c]. But though he was anointed in this world in an infinitely more abundant measure than all who were partakers of the same Divine unction, yet it was rather after his death that the Spirit was given to him as "the oil of *gladness*." At his ascension the words before us received their full accomplishment. Then was "the joy given him, in the expectation of which he had endured the cross and despised the shame." Then was he "made full of joy by the light of his Father's countenance[d]," and was invested

[a] Heb. i. 8, 9.

[b] He shewed that the laws prohibiting murder and adultery were violated by an angry word or impure desire. Matt. xxv. 21, 22, 27, 28.

[c] See Isai. xi. 2. & lxi. 1.

[d] Compare Ps. xvi. 10, 11. & xxi. 6. with Acts ii. 27, 28.

invested with a glory as much transcending that of the highest archangel, as the brightness of the sun exceeds the lustre of a glimmering star. This was given him as the reward of his righteousness: "he loved righteousness;" "*therefore* the Lord anoirted him with this oil of gladness[e]."]

Though this is the primary sense of the words, we shall not pervert them, if we consider them,

II. As applicable to us—

The character of the true Christian is here most fitly drawn—

[There are many Unbelievers whose moral characters are unexceptionable: they *abstain from* open iniquity, and they *perform* many acts of righteousness. But the distinctive mark of the Believer is, that "he *loves* righteousness and *hates* iniquity." He looks upon sin as the worst enemy of his soul. Not contented with suppressing the outward acts of it, he strives to mortify its inward motions. The existence of sin within him is his pain, his burthen, his grief. He abhors it; he lothes himself on account of it: he often cries with anguish of heart, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me? As for righteousness, he considers it as the health and felicity of his soul. It is the very element in which he desires to live. Were he possessed of it in ever so high a degree, he would not be satisfied, as long as there were any measure of it which he had not attained. He would be "holy as God is holy," and "perfect as God is perfect." We repeat it, that *this is the distinctive character of a true Believer*. Others, whatever their conduct be, have no real hatred of secret sin, no unfeigned delight in the secret exercises of religion: but in the Believer these dispositions radically and abidingly exist.]

On this account God vouchsafes him the richest communications—

[Who amongst the sons of pleasure can be compared with the Christian in respect to real happiness? The happiness of the carnal man is only as "the crackling of thorns under a pot;" it blazes for a little time, and then expires in smoke. Let a true Christian be bereft of all that the world holds most dear, and be reduced to a condition the most calamitous in the eyes of carnal men, yet would he not exchange states with the happiest worldling upon earth: he would spurn at the proposal with contemptuous indignation.

But it is not merely over the ungodly world that a lively Christian has this advantage: "he is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows," above those who in an inferior degree participate

[e] Phil. ii. 8, 9.

cipate the same heavenly calling. Occasional circumstances of temptation or of darkness may indeed for a time reduce the most eminent Christian below the standard of his weaker brother: but *in the general* it will be found, that the more we have of the Divine image, the more we shall abound in heavenly consolation: they will have most of heaven in their souls, who have the greatest meetness for it in their hearts and lives.

And though these holy joys are not bestowed on account of the Believer's *merits*, yet are they strictly and properly a reward for his piety: they are a reward of grace, though not a payment of a debt. God has in numberless places assured his people, that "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," and that "it shall be well with the righteous, who shall eat the fruit of their doings[f]."]

INFER,

1. What a mercy is it to have such an example as Christ!

[If we entertain any doubt how we ought to walk, or what shall be the issue of a godly life, we need only look to the Lord Jesus Christ: in him we see precisely "how we ought to walk and to please God," and what shall be the termination of a life spent in the service of our God. In him we shall find an answer to the cavils of the world on the one hand, and to the suggestions of Satan on the other. In those things which Christ did as a Prophet, or as the Mediator, he is not an example to us; but in all other things he is: and as surely as we tread in his steps in this world, we shall be seated with him on his throne in the world to come.]

2. How vain are the expectations of those who are not conformed to it!

[Holiness and happiness are inseparable. It is in vain to hope for the oil of gladness, if we be not lovers of righteousness, and haters of iniquity. We may applaud and canonize those who conform to the world's standard of perfection; but God will not ratify our sentence. The precepts of the Gospel are the infallible, the only rule of duty. They were exhibited in all their perfection by our blessed Lord, who gave us in his own life a comment on them. If we labour to imitate him, and to walk in all things as he walked, our short-comings and defects will be forgiven us for his sake: but if we make any reserves in our obedience, we shall be regarded as despisers of his law, and take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. "Herein the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God."]

[f] Isai. iii. 10.

## CCCLXVI.

### THE CHURCH'S BEAUTY AND HAPPINESS.

Ps. xlv. 13—16. *The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee: with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace.*

AMONGST the Schoolmen of former days, there were many disputes about works of condignity, and works of congruity, as contributing to effect the salvation of men. That in no point of view whatever did works render men deserving of God's favours is the avowed sentiment of our Church; yet to the full possession of salvation, it is quite necessary that every man be holy, and possess what the Scriptures call "a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light."

The Church is here represented under the character of a Bride that is to be joined as in the marriage union to her Lord. For this she must be prepared: and a preparation shall be given her suited to the occasion. In the former part of this psalm, which is penned on the occasion of her marriage, the excellencies of her Lord are set forth: in this latter part, her excellencies also. Let us consider,

I. Her transcendent qualities—

In the words which we have read, we see,

1. The internal qualities of her mind—

["The King's daughter is all glorious within." She once, in her unconverted state, was corrupt even as others: but she has been "born again," and "renewed in the spirit of her mind," and made altogether "a new creature." Once, being born only after the flesh, she had nothing but what was carnal: but now, having been born of the Spirit, she possesses a truly spiritual nature, or, as St. Peter expresses it, "she is a partaker of the Divine nature[a];" and is progressively "changed into the image of her Lord himself, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord[b]." Hence "the mind that was in Christ Jesus is found in her[c]." She has the same views, the same principles, the same desires,

[a] 2 Pet. i. 4. [b] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [c] Phil. ii. 5.

desires, the same delights. There is indeed still a corrupt nature within her, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh:" but she longs to be holy, as her Lord is holy; and strives to be "perfect, as her Father which is in heaven is perfect." When compared with what she was, she differs as light from darkness: but in comparison of what she will be, she is only as the dawn to the meridian sun; for "her path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

2. The external habits of her life—

["Her clothing is of wrought gold." This refers to the outward conversation, which is often in Scripture represented as a putting off of the old man, and putting on the new: "Put off, as concerning the former conversation," says the Apostle, "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness[d]." To the same effect is that other expression of his, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ[e]:" that is, let your whole deportment be such as his was; so that any one who beholds you may be constrained to confess, that you "walk as he walked[f]," and that, "as he was, so are ye in this world[g]." Such is every true Believer; nor will the heavenly Bridegroom acknowledge as his, any one, whose spirit, and temper, and conduct do not accord with his. "The raiment of needle-work" may fitly represent the assemblage of all diversified graces which adorn her. All her dispositions being duly chastised, harmoniously tempered, and opportunely exercised, she shines in every department, and in every act; and at once approves herself faithful to her obligations, and meet for the ulterior honours that shall be conferred upon her.]

Suited to these qualities is,

II. The felicity prepared for her—

In due time "she shall be brought to the King's palace," there to be united to him in indissoluble and everlasting bonds.

Whilst she is here, she is to be employed in making herself ready—

[In royal nuptials, much time was spent in preparing the bride for her husband. In the purification of the virgins from amongst whom King Ahasuerus was to select a wife, a whole year was occupied: "six months in purifying them with oil of myrrh, and other six months with sweet odours of different kinds[h]:" after which they were presented to him. In like manner

[d] Eph. iv. 22—24. [e] Rom. xiii. 14. [f] 1 John ii. 6.
[g] 1 John iv. 17. [h] Esth. ii. 12, 13.

manner we are told, that the Church also is dealt with, in order to prepare her for her heavenly Bridegroom: for it is said, that "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*, that he might *present it to himself a glorious Church*, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish[i]."

[This process is going forward through the whole of this life. Every work of providence, every communication of grace, every afflictive dispensation, and every joyous occurrence, is intended to advance it; that so at last the soul of the Believer may be altogether "worthy to stand before" the King of kings, and to be admitted to the closest fellowship with him for ever and ever.]

This work completed, she is introduced "into the palace of her Lord"—

[It was customary for a number of bridemaids to attend upon the bride, in order to welcome her to her destined home. Accordingly it is said, "The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought with her to the King's palace." Even here, whenever any are united unto the Lord, many, both of saints and angels, are ready to congratulate them on the blissful occasion. And how much more will this be the case, when those who are espoused to him in this world shall be brought to consummate their nuptials in the realms of bliss! We read of angels waiting upon Lazarus, to bear his spirit to Abraham's bosom. So at the departure of every saint we may well conceive of multitudes of angels and of their former friends coming forth to welcome their arrival. And oh! what joy will fill every soul! It is said, "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought;" and we may see in the book of Revelations the whole ceremony pass, as it were, before our eyes. "I heard the voice of a great multitude, saying, Allelujah! let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the white linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb[k]." Yes, blessed are they indeed, whether in the character of the spouse or her attendants: for though on earth they are different, in heaven they are the same; the one being the collective body of the Church, of which the others are the individual members. This representation, it must be confessed, is figurative: but under the figure there is a reality: for, as the Scripture says, "These are the true sayings of God[m]!"]

ADDRESS,

[i] Eph. v. 25—27. [k] Matt. xxv. i.
[l] Rev. xix. 7—9. [m] ib.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet been espoused to Christ—

[Let it not be forgotten, that this is a very common figure in Scripture to represent the surrender of the soul to God. To his Church of old God said by the prophet Hosea, "Thou shalt abide for me many days; (referring, like our text, to the purifications preparatory to nuptials;) thou shalt not play the harlot; and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee[n]." And again; "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord[o]." In the New Testament also every Believer is spoken of in this view: "I have espoused you to one Husband," says St. Paul, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ[p]." Know ye then, that if you have never solemnly engaged yourselves to Christ, as a virgin does to the object of her affections, and so pledged yourselves, as not for a moment to admit a rival to your heart, you are not yet Christians indeed: you may bear the name; but you have no just title to the character. I call upon you therefore to do this without delay. And, if you desire to postpone this necessary act, I ask, Whom have you found so worthy of your affections as the Lord Jesus Christ? Who has done so much for you to deserve them? ——— and who will ever make you so rich a return? ——— Say not, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us[q]:" for there is none to be compared with him, either in heaven or on earth. "He is fairer than the children of men[r]:" "He is the chiefest among ten thousand:" "He is altogether lovely[s]." Oh, rest not, till with holy confidence you can say, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem[t]." And so set yourselves from this moment to prepare yourselves for him, that he may shortly "bring you to his banqueting-house, and his banner over you be love[u]."]

2. Those who profess to stand in the relation of his Spouse—

[Look forward for the period when he will come and take you to himself. The precise hour of his arrival is not known: but it will not be very long, at all events. In the mean time, let your preparation for him be diligent and unintermitted. Seek to be daily more and more "glorious within," and to have your clothing of wrought gold ever ready; so that if his arrival be ever so

[n] Hos. iii. 3. [o] Hos. ii. 19, 20. [p] 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[q] Cant. v. 9. [r] Ps. xlv. 2. [s] Cant. v. 10, 16.
[t] Cant. v. 16. [u] ib. ii. 3, 4.

so sudden, he may not find you unprepared for his call. Be jealous over yourselves; and forgive me if I also be jealous over you, in relation to this matter. You know how "the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety" even in Paradise: and you may be sure that he will use his utmost efforts to "corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ[x]." Be on your guard therefore, lest either in principle or in practice you turn aside from him. He has numberless instruments whom he employs as his agents to deceive the world; "deceitful workers, who can transform themselves into the apostles of Christ; as he himself also is not unfrequently transformed into an angel of light[y]." But intreat of God to keep you: beg of him to "hedge up your way with thorns, and even to build up a wall around you, that, if you should for a moment incline to follow after your former lovers———, you may not be able to find your paths." If unhappily you have gone in pursuit of them———, implore of God, that "you may never find them; or, having found, may never overtake them:" or, if you have overtaken them———, separate yourselves instantly from them, and say, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now[z]"———]

[x] 2 Cor. xi. 3. [y] 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14. [z] Hos. ii. 6, 7.

## CCCLXVII.

### THE CHURCH'S SECURITY IN GOD.

Ps. xlviii. 12—14. *Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof: mark ye well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.*

MEN read the Bible in order that they may know what they are to *do*; and this is well: but they should read the Bible also in order that they may know what they are to *expect*: for that blessed book is no less a record of their privileges, than of their duties. It is of privileges that our text speaks. The psalm evidently celebrates some triumph over confederate kings[a]: and it was probably written on the occasion of Jehosaphat's deliverance from the confederate armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir; who, through the special providence of God, turned

[a] ver. 4.

turned their arms against each other, and left Jehosaphat nothing to do but to collect the spoil[b]. That, as might be expected, was a season of very exalted joy to all Judah: and the circumstances altogether correspond very exactly with the intimations given in this psalm. The security of Zion under the Divine protection is that which is particularly specified in the text: and we are called to notice it for the benefit of future generations.

Let us consider,

I. The survey proposed—

Whatever strength might be in the fortifications of Jerusalem, the writer of this psalm evidently looked beyond them to God, who alone is the security of his people. Moreover, Zion was a type of the Church of God, which is indeed "the mountain of his holiness, beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth; and in whose palaces he is well known for a refuge[c]." Let us then "walk about her, and tell her towers, and mark well her bulwarks." Let us mark the bulwarks,

1. Of the Jewish Church—

[This was founded on the *purposes*, the *perfections*, and the *promises* of God; and from them derived her strength and her security.

In a season of great alarm and terror, the prophet being asked, "What shall we answer the messengers of the nation," who come to apprise us of the approach of the Philistine armies? His answer was, "Tell them that *the Lord hath founded* Zion, and that the poor of his people shall trust in it[d]." To this St. Paul adds, "*The foundation of the Lord standeth sure*, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his[e]." God had determined from all eternity that he would have a Church and people in the world; and hence it was that neither Pharaoh in Egypt could prevent, nor all the nations of Canaan could obstruct, the establishment of Mount Zion: for "God's counsel must stand; and he would do all his will[f]."

For the preservation of his Church, every perfection of the Deity was pledged. Whilst his wisdom was engaged to disconcert, and his power to defeat, all her enemies, his truth and faithfulness formed a barrier that could not be broken through:

so

[b] 2 Chron. xx. 22—25. [c] ver. 1—3. [d] Isai. xiv. 32.
[e] 2 Tim. ii. 19. [f] Isai. xlvi. 10.

so that, till by the iniquities of his people he was constrained to depart from them, he was "a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in the midst of them[g]:" and every attribute of his was "a chamber in which they might lie down in perfect peace[h]."

Often it appeared as if his promise in relation to them would fail; but not a jot or tittle of his word ever did fail: for "he was not a man that he could lie, or the son of man that he could repent." And, after the people had been forty years established in the land of Canaan, Joshua appealed to them, that "not one good thing had failed of all that God had spoken concerning them, but that every thing had come to pass according to his promise[i]."]

2. Of the Christian Church—

[Our Zion also has "her towers and her bulwarks," even *the finished work of Christ*, and *the office of the Holy Spirit*, and *the economy of Redemption from first to last*.

The Lord Jesus undertook to purchase unto himself a peculiar people, even with the inestimable price of his own blood: and never did he cease from his work, till he could say, "It is finished[k]." Every thing that was necessary to expiate our guilt, every thing that was necessary to work out a righteousness for his redeemed people, every thing that was necessary to satisfy the demands of law and justice, all he completed perfectly: and having fulfilled his covenant-engagements with the Father, it cannot be but that "he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied," even in the promised seed, who should prolong their days, whilst "the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands[l]."

True it is, that in vain would Christ have died for his Church and people, if the Holy Spirit had not undertaken to apply to their souls the redemption which he has wrought out for them. But from the day of Pentecost to this very hour he has not failed "to glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto men[m]." He finds men dead indeed; but he quickens them to a new and heavenly life: he gives them eyes, to see; and ears, to hear; and hearts to feel the truths which he has revealed to them: and "where he has begun a work of grace, he fails not to carry it on, and to perfect it until the day of Christ[n]." And hence it is that all the powers of hell have never been able to prevail against them.

Were the Church to be destroyed, the whole plan of Redemption, as devised by the Father, executed by the Son, and applied by the Spirit, would fail; and the Lord Jesus Christ himself be robbed

[g] Zech. ii. 5. [h] Isai. xxvi. 20. [i] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[k] John xix. 30. [l] Isai. liii. 10, 11. [m] John xvi. 14.
[n] Phil. i. 6.

robbed of all his recompence and all his glory. But, whoever surveys "these towers," will know assuredly, that "Mount Zion cannot be moved, but abideth for ever[o]." Yes, "God's righteousness shall be for ever, and his salvation from generation to generation[p]."]

3. Of the Church of which we are members—

[*As against the world*, the Church of England has no other security than what is common to every true Church of Christ: but as *against her professed members*, who would despoil her of her glory and her excellency, and would sap her very foundations by the introduction of false doctrines into her community, we have towers, and bulwarks, in which we glory, and which we desire you all attentively to survey. "Come, and let us walk round our Zion, and mark well her defences!" See there *her Articles;* how plain, how strong, how Scriptural! there is no truth that is not there established: and though she has many false sons who would surrender them up to the enemy, there is not one which they have ever been able to impair, nor one in which her faithful people do not feel complete security.

Next, behold *her Homilies*, formed by men of God who knew what assaults would be made against her. There are not wanting men who complain, that these are antiquated, and need repair. But they are as firm and immoveable as the first hour they were constructed: and they defy all the assaults, whether of traitorous friends, or open foes.

Then view *her Liturgy*.—Next to the Bible, it stands the wonder of the world. Never was there such a composition for the use of those who would worship God in Spirit and in truth: and, whilst piety shall continue to characterize the Children of Zion, this will be their joy, their glory, their defence. They may be derided, as too holy, and too precise: but, whilst they can point to her expressions both of prayer and praise, they will feel that they are vindicated against the whole world, and are in a bulwark that is absolutely impregnable.]

The end of this survey is, "that we may tell it to the generation following:" which shews, that, both for their sakes and our own, we should contemplate,

II. The consolation arising from it—

What was written so many centuries ago, belongs no less to us than it did to those from whom the immediate occasion for it was taken. It calls our attention to the God of Zion, and reminds us of,

1. Our

[o] Ps. cxxv. 1. [p] Isai. li. 8.

1. Our interest in him—

[" This God is our God for ever and ever." He is *the same in himself;* and *bears the same relation to us;* and *feels the same concern for us* as he did for his Church of old.

" He changeth not:" " he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." " With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." And is he not *our* Father, *our* Friend, *our* Redeemer, *our* God? When did he cease to sustain these relations to his Church and people? or when did he cease to be mindful of the offices which these relations imply? If it be said, He has ceased to work miracles; we grant it: but has he therefore withdrawn himself from the Church and from the world, so as to shut up his loving-kindness from us, and to be gracious to us no more? Were we indeed to believe the infidel and ungodly world, we should say with them, that " God has forsaken the earth:" but we know the contrary: we know, that if God's presence and agency be less visible than formerly, they are not a whit less real; and that he feels for his people at this hour, as much as ever he did at any period of the world. " He knows their sorrows[q]," and " in all their afflictions is afflicted[r]:" nor can an enemy touch so much as one of them, without touching " the apple of his eye[s]."

Take this then into your consideration, in connexion with the foregoing survey. The same God as watched so tenderly over his people of old, is your God; and watches over you, with the same care as he did over them. His purposes have as much respect to you as to them: his perfections are all engaged as much for you, as for them: his promises are made no less to you, than to them. For you the work of Christ, the office of the Spirit, and the whole economy of Redemption, have secured blessings, as well as for them. And the same Spirit who was poured forth in such abundant measures upon our Reformers, and endued them with such consummate wisdom and grace, is ready to " work upon your hearts, and to " fulfil in you also all the good pleasure of God's goodness, and the work of faith with power, so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ[t]." I say then, know from the records of the Church of old what a God you have to go to, and that " this God is your God for ever and ever."]

2. Our expectations from him—

[" He will be our guide even unto death." See how remarkably he guided Jehosaphat on the occasion which we suppose to be more particularly referred to: he told Jehosaphat where his enemies were, at what precise spot he should find them,

[q] Exod. iii. 7. [r] Isai. lxiii. 9. [s] Zech. ii. 8.
[t] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

them, and when he should go against them: *twice* was it repeated, "To-morrow go out against them[u]." So he knows exactly where our enemies are, and what they design against us, and how they are to be met: and though he will not vanquish them without our fighting, yet, if we go forth against them in dependence on him, "he will be with us," and will subdue them before us. Suppose our most formidable enemies now in array against us; and see in what way he will interpose in our behalf: "Like as a lion," says he, "and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of Hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem: defending also, he will deliver it; and passing over, he will preserve it[x]." Here are no less than three figures, rising in a climax one above the other, to illustrate the zeal and efficacy with which he will interpose for us. The first is, that of a lion, who, when devouring his prey, will not be intimidated by the noise of shepherds, how numerous soever they may be: (This marks *the determination* with which Jehovah will prosecute our cause.) The next is that of a parent bird, who, when she sees a bird of prey hovering over her young, and ready to dart upon them, will fly with the utmost rapidity to intercept the devourer's assault, even at the peril of her own life: (This shews *the tender interest* which Jehovah will take in our welfare, and the efforts he will make in our behalf.) The last is that of the attendant Angel (the Angel of the Covenant), who accompanied the destroying angel through the whole land of Egypt, and stepped forward, wherever he saw a blood-besprinkled door, to prevent him from executing his commission there: and so effectually constrained him to "*pass over*" the houses of the Israelites, that, whilst in every house in Egypt the first-born of man and beast was slain, not one of either was slain in any house belonging to the Children of Israel: (This shews *the efficacy* with which Jehovah will espouse our cause.) Now then what have we to fear with such a Protector? Let men or devils combine against us, we need not give ourselves one moment's concern. Under all such circumstances, the Psalmist's language should be ours: "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God; the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High: God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early[y]." In a word, we may "cast all our care on Him who careth for us[z];" assured,

[u] 2 Chron. xx. 16.
[x] Isai. xxxi. 4, 5.
[y] Ps. xlvi. 1—5.
[z] 1 Pet. v. 7.

assured, that, "if we only make God our refuge and habitation, no evil shall befall us[a]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Search then into your privileges, that you may have the true enjoyment of them—

[Think of people in a besieged city: with what delight would they view the towers and bulwarks which they had reason to believe no enemy could destroy! And will not *you*, who have the Lord himself for your defence? Consider the representation which he gives of himself, as a broad river, so broad that it cannot be passed but in boats; yet so tempestuous, that no small vessel can live upon it; and so full of rocks and shoals, that no large vessel can navigate it[b]; which consequently, being impassable, secures to you, under all circumstances, the most perfect tranquillity: consider this, I say, and tell me, whether you ought not to be ever rejoicing in your God? I would that all of you should be fully acquainted with your privileges; and that you should be frequently "walking about Zion, and telling her towers, and marking well her bulwarks, and considering attentively her palaces" in which you are lodged and feasted from day to day; that so you may be happy in your own souls; and that "God may dwell in you, whilst you thus dwell in him!" For, if you thus "know in Whom you have believed, and that He is able to keep that which you have committed to him[c]," you cannot but be happy: since he has expressly said, "I will keep *him* in perfect peace whose mind is staid on me, because he trusteth in me[d]."]

2. Search into them, that you may make them known to the rising generation—

[We should not be contented to be happy alone, but should desire as far as possible to diffuse happiness all around us. To the rising generation in particular we are bound to transmit the benefits which we have received. The knowledge of Salvation is a sacred deposit, committed to us for that very end[e] ——— It is scarcely to be conceived how much more profitable to young people the preached Gospel would be, if they were well instructed at home. We teach our children what shall conduce to the advancement of their worldly interests; and shall we neglect the welfare of their souls[f]? ——— In particular, let us endeavour to impress their minds with the knowledge of God, and his perfections; of Christ, and his offices; of the Holy Spirit, and his operations; that so they also may have God for *their* God, and *their* guide, and *their* portion, for ever and ever.]

[a] Ps. xci. 9, 10. [b] Isai. xxxiii. 20—22. [c] 2 Tim. i. 12.
[d] Isai. xxvi. 3. [e] Ps. lxxviii. 5—7.
[f] If this were the subject of a Sermon for a *Charity School*, or *Sunday School*, this idea should be considerably enlarged.

## CCCLXVIII.

### THE FOLLY OF WORLDLY MEN.

Ps. xlix. 13. *This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings.*

IT is generally supposed that wisdom pertains chiefly, if not exclusively, to those who are proficients in arts and science: but learning and wisdom are by no means necessarily connected with each other: they may exist separately, each in a high degree: and, in fact, there is nothing more common than to behold persons of the most extensive erudition acting the part of fools in God's sight, whilst persons destitute of all human acquirements are "walking wisely before him in a perfect way." Wisdom, properly viewed, is a conformity of the mind and will to the mind and will of God; and it exists precisely in proportion as this conformity exists: the resemblance is wisdom, the deviation folly. Hence we see why David, at the commencement of this psalm, calls, in so solemn a manner, persons of every age and quality to attend to his instructions; and professes to teach them lessons of the profoundest wisdom, when there is not any thing recondite, or any thing uncommon, in the whole psalm. The truths contained in this Divine ode are level with every capacity, and therefore might seem to be improperly ushered in with so pompous an introduction: but they are at the root of all practical religion; and they draw a broad line of distinction between those who are wise, and those who are unwise, in the estimation of their God.

The whole subject of the psalm will come properly before us, whilst we consider,

I. The way of worldly men—

It may naturally be expected, that "they who are of the world, should speak of the world," and seek it as their most desired portion: and they are described as doing so in the psalm before us.

They are altogether engrossed with earthly things—

[Worldly

[Worldly distinction is the one object of their ambition. For this end chiefly both wealth and honour are pursued[a]. Having attained these things in any considerable degree, they bless themselves, as possessing somewhat wherein they may trust[b], somewhat that will make them happy for a long time to come, and somewhat that shall transmit their names to posterity as worthy of admiration[c] ———]

But "this their way is their folly"—

[Wealth and honour are far from affording the satisfaction that is expected from them: they will not ward off sickness and death, either from ourselves or others[d]: nor can they follow us into the eternal world[e]. The moment we die, as very speedily we all must[f], nothing of them remains to us but the fearful responsibility attached to the possession of them. Instead of "profiting us in the day of wrath," they will rather augment our final condemnation, if they have not been improved for God as talents committed to us. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus we behold the bitter consequences of living only to the flesh: the man who has his good things in this life, will want in the eternal world a drop of water to cool his tongue: "he will never see light," but be consigned over to the everlasting regions of darkness and despair[g]. We wonder not therefore, that the man, who, because he had gotten much, thought of nothing but his temporal enjoyments, "Soul, take thine ease," is by God himself derided as a fool: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee."]

Yet such is the influence of example, that, notwithstanding the folly of such conduct is visible to all, the same is pursued by every succeeding generation—

[No one who considers for a moment the issue of such conduct to those who have gone before them, can doubt the folly of it: for, whatever rank or station men held in this life, or whatever may be said of them now they are gone, what remains to them of their wealth or honour, or what enjoyment have they of their posthumous fame? If we extol them ever so high, they feel no satisfaction; and if we condemn them ever so harshly, they are unconscious of either shame or pain: they are interested in nothing but in the quality of their actions as approved or condemned by their Judge. This we all know; yet no sooner have we a prospect of the wealth and honour ourselves, than our desires are as ardent, our expectations as sanguine, and our dependence as unqualified, as that of any who have gone before us. The conviction of their folly only floats in our imagination, but

[a] ver. 18. [b] ver. 6. [c] ver. 11. [d] ver. 7—10.
[e] ver. 17. [f] ver. 12, 14. [g] ver. 19.

but never descends as a principle into our hearts. We see and blame their folly; yet approve in practice what in theory we condemn.]

As contrasted with this, let us consider,

II. The way which true wisdom prescribes—

In verse 15, the Psalmist gives us that precise view of the subject which he had before characterized as replete with wisdom: "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me;" that is, Whilst worldly men have no prospects beyond the grave, I look forward to a happy eternity, which shall be the portion of all who truly serve God. Hence then we see what way true wisdom prescribes: it teaches us,

1. To regard this world in its connexion with eternity—

[View this world as the whole state of man's existence; and they speak well, who say; "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But this world is a mere passage to a better: it is an inn, at which we sojourn for a night, in our way to a better country. A person tarrying only for a few hours is not greatly elated, if his accommodations be good; nor greatly depressed, if they be bad. He considers, in either case, that it is not his home; that his comfort or discomfort is very transient; and that it will be time enough to look for unmixed enjoyments, when he shall have reached his Father's house. Moreover, this world must be considered as a state of preparation for a better; every thing that is done here being an occasion of increased happiness or augmented misery to all eternity. In this view of the world, every pain and every pleasure acquires a new aspect. The things that are so highly prized by ungodly men lose their value; and every thing is esteemed good or bad, according as it quickens or retards us in our Christian course. Hence true wisdom says, "Love not the world[gg]," "neither be of it[h];" but "be crucified to it, and let it be as one crucified to you[hh]."]

2. To follow the footsteps of the saints of old—

[There are those who have gone before us, whose ways were not folly, though they might be esteemed foolish by those who were themselves blinded by Satan. "Abraham went out from his kindred and his country, not knowing whither he went[i]:" Moses refused all the wealth and honour that Egypt could afford, that he might participate in the lot of God's persecuted

[gg] John ii. 15, 16. [h] John xvii. 14, 16.
[hh] Gal. vi. 14. [i] Heb. xi. 8.

secuted and despised people[j]: many saints "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance[k]:" Matthew left his lucrative employment to follow Christ[l]: Paul suffered the loss of all things for Christ[m]; and after having engaged in the Christian course, attended to nothing but his progress in it, straining every nerve to win and secure the prize[n]. All of these would be thought by the world to carry religion to a very culpable excess: but they acted with consummate wisdom, each in the part he took: they all "chose the good part, which could not be taken away from them." Let any one who reflects on the *present* state of these eminent saints, say, whether "their way was folly?" If it was not; if, on the contrary, it accorded with the dictates of true wisdom; then let all not only "approve their *sayings*," but imitate their *doings* also, and "be followers of them, as they were of Christ."]

ADVICE,

1. Guard against the influence of bad example—

[There is nothing urged with greater confidence to deter young persons from a religious course, or to draw them back again to the world, than example. They are told from time to time what such and such persons do; and can this be wrong? But whoever they are who are proposed to us for examples, we have only one question to ask; Did they regulate their conduct according to the revealed will of God? and was it the one labour of their lives to walk as Christ walked? If this was not the case, it signifies not who they were, or what they did: "their way was their folly;" and instead of taking them as examples to follow, we should rather regard them as monuments to warn us against impending ruin. If the number and respectability of the persons be urged, let us remember, that to "walk according to the course of this world, is to walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." "Christ died to deliver us from this present evil world:" we must therefore leave the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and walk in "the narrow way that leadeth unto life." True it is, that "if we do well unto ourselves (in advancing our own temporal interests), men will speak good of us[o]:" but it is of little consequence what men speak or think: nothing will be of any lasting benefit to us, but the approbation of our God[p].]

2. Cleave to Him who alone is able to redeem our souls—

[If man cannot redeem his brother from temporal death, much

[j] ib. ver. 24—26. [k] Heb. x. 34. [l] Matt. ix. 9.
[m] Phil. iii. 8. [n] ib. ver. 13, 14.
[o] ver. 18. [p] 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

much less can he the soul from spiritual and eternal death: the price required for that is more than all the creatures in earth or heaven are able to pay[q]. But Christ has paid the mighty ransom: with his own "precious blood," he has redeemed us from sin and Satan, from death and hell. Seek him then, and you are richer than ten thousand worlds could make you. In him you have "durable riches, and righteousness." Go to him, and he will give you "gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich." After him your desires cannot be too ardent; your expectations from him cannot be too enlarged; your dependence on him cannot be too entire and confident. On that side you need not fear excess. And if the world deride your way as folly, regard it not: they will soon alter their sentiments: the moment they enter into the eternal world, they will know infallibly who were wise and who were fools: and when they meet you at the judgment-seat of Christ, they will say, "We fools counted their life madness:" their reproaches then will be turned upon themselves, and their one subject of lamentation will be, that they "approved the sayings" of a blind ungodly world, instead of the infallible sayings of their God. This is the way to "walk not as fools, but as wise:" and, so walking, you shall surely ere long have the plaudit of your Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servants! enter ye into the joy of your Lord."]

[q] ver. 7—9.

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## CCCLXIX.

### SPIRITUAL OBEDIENCE PREFERRED BEFORE SACRIFICE.

Ps. L. 7—15. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

IN the psalm before us we have one of those sublime addresses which Jehovah occasionally makes to the whole creation, to hear and judge between him

him and his offending people[a]. The images are taken from his appearance on Mount Sinai, which was with terrible majesty, insomuch that "Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake[b]." The scene is "Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty," even that Zion from whence the Gospel has proceeded, and from whence Jehovah speaks to us as *our* Covenant-God: and this circumstance adds tenfold weight to his accusations against us. The persons whom he arraigns before his tribunal are of two descriptions; those who rested in mere ceremonial observances for the obtaining of God's favour; and those who, pretending to higher principles, dishonoured by their conduct their high and holy profession; or in other words, formalists and hypocrites. It is the former of these two characters whom he reproves in our text: and the testimony which he bears against them sets forth in very striking terms,

I. The worthlessness of merely formal religion—

Men are apt to imagine, that by their observance of external duties they lay God under obligation to them—

[God had appointed many rites and ceremonies; and he required the observance of them on the pain of death[c]: but he enjoined them for the people's good, and not for any benefit that could accrue to himself. What pleasure could he take in the blood of bulls and goats? or, if he did, what need had he to be indebted to his people for such offerings, when the whole world was his, and all the cattle on a thousand hills were at his command? It was absurd therefore and impious in his people to think that they conferred any obligation upon him by their offerings and oblations.

But the very same error obtains amongst us at this day. If we comply with the external commands of God in an observance of the sabbath, an attendance on ordinances, and a performance of certain duties in the family and the closet, we think that we have a just claim on God, and that he must of necessity feel as much complacency in us, as we do in ourselves. We adduce these services as a clear evidence of the goodness of our hearts, and as an indisputable title to the Divine favour — — —]

But

[a] Isai. i. 2, 3. Mic. vi. 2.
[b] Exod. xix. 16—18. with Heb. xii. 18—21. [c] Numb. xv. 30.

But external services are of no value in the sight of God, any farther than they are accompanied with vital piety—

[On many occasions God declared his contempt for outward observances, in comparison of spiritual obedience: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams." By the prophet Isaiah, God replies to those who boasted of "the multitude of their sacrifices;" and tells them, that the whole course of their services, unaccompanied as they were with real piety, were an utter abomination in his sight[d] ——— Even whilst bringing his people through the wilderness, he had explicitly declared to them, by Balaam, that it was "not by offering thousands of rams, or rivers of oil, or by giving their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul, that they were to please him, but by doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God[e]." In like manner we are told by our blessed Lord, that it is "to no purpose that we pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, if we neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth[f];" and that to draw nigh to God with our lips whilst our heart is far from him, is nothing but vile hypocrisy[g]. Indeed a moment's consideration may convince us, that outward services, of whatever kind, cannot be of any value in the sight of God, except as expressions or vehicles of inward piety: for they may be performed without any good principle in the soul; yea, they may proceed from extremely vile and corrupt principles, such as pride, and ostentation, and self-righteousness; and they may most abound, not only where all manner of iniquity is harboured, but as a cloak and cover to that iniquity[h]. In a word, "a form of godliness, where the power of it is denied," is the consummation of all ungodliness[i].]

This is an offensive truth indeed, but it is indispensably necessary to be received—

[How offensive a truth this is, may be seen by the way in which the hearers of the first martyr, Stephen, resented it, even before it was actually declared, and when they discovered it only as the ultimate scope of his argument. Stephen had given a summary view of God's dealings with his people from the very beginning: and the scope of his argument was, that as God had a people before the Mosaic dispensation commenced, so he would after its termination; as had been intimated by the prophet Isaiah, who represents God as pouring contempt even upon the Temple itself, in comparison of a broken and contrite heart. This passage having been cited by Stephen, the whole audience were filled with

[d] Isai. i. 11—15. [e] Mic. vi. 6—8. [f] Matt. xxiii. 23.
[g] Matt. xv. 8. [h] Matt. xxiii. 14. [i] 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

with indignation, which was visibly manifested in all their countenances, and which gave occasion to that exceedingly abrupt change in Stephen's address to them; "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye[k]." Similar offence is given at this day, when we declare the worthlessness of all external duties as detached from the feelings of the heart. But the very circumstance of God calling heaven and earth to hear his testimony against his people, sufficiently shews, that his accusations, against whomsoever brought, involve in them the deepest criminality, and subject the accused to the heaviest condemnation.]

Contrasted with mere ritual observances, we behold in our text,

II. The religion which alone is pleasing and acceptable to God—

Religion consists not so much in actions, as in the habit of the mind towards God. Holy actions of every kind spring from it; but they are only as the fruit, which originates in, and bears testimony to, the vital energy of the root. Wherever religion exists in the soul, it will have respect to God in all things, and will induce in us *a habit* towards him,

1. Of lively gratitude—

[He is our Creator, our Benefactor, our Redeemer: and the very first motions of religion will lead us to view him under these relations, and with feelings suited to the obligations he has conferred upon us. Can we reflect on the faculties with which he has endowed us, so far superior to all the brute creation, and not adore and magnify his name? Can we contemplate the innumerable benefits with which we are loaded by him from day to day, and not feel how greatly we are indebted to him? Above all, can we survey the wonders of Redeeming Love, and not have our whole souls penetrated with an overwhelming sense of gratitude? ——— So infinitely does this love surpass all human comprehension or conception, that if our minds were filled with it as they ought to be, we should scarcely be able to think or speak of any thing else ——— Such, we are sure, is the religion of heaven; for there "they rest not day nor night" in ascribing all possible praises to their Redeeming God[l]: and such, according to the measure of grace given to us, will be the dispositions and habits of all who are truly alive to God ——— "We shall offer him the sacrifice of praise continnally[m]," and "render to him the calves of our lips[n]."]

2. Of

[k] Compare Isai. lxvi. 1, 2. with Acts vii. 47—51.
[l] Rev. iv. 8—11. & v. 11—13. [m] Heb. xiii. 15.
[n] Hos. xiv. 2.

2. Of willing service—

[The Jews were, by the very covenant they had entered into at their circumcision, bound to consider themselves as "a holy people, a kingdom of priests:" and we also, by virtue of our baptismal vows, are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people[o]." The vows then made, it will be now our labour, and our delight, to perform. As the holy angels are "doing God's will, hearkening to the voice of his word," so shall we be studying to know his will, and be standing ready to execute it to the utmost of our power. It is astonishing what an alteration a principle of religion makes in the soul in this particular! The natural man lives only to himself: the spiritual man lives, or at least endeavours to live, wholly to the Lord; to have no will, no way, no desire, no thought, but what will be pleasing and acceptable in his sight. What was the first expression of piety in Paul, is the first of every converted soul; "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" A view of him as our Master and our Father will insure this[p]: and in proportion as religion increases in the soul, will be our endeavour to "glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his[q]."]

3. Of humble dependence—

[Religion leads us to realize in our minds the thought of God's superintending care and effectual agency in our behalf. It does not bring us only to a sense of our obligations to him, but, if we may so speak, to a sense also of his obligations to us: for, if "we be his people, he also is our God:" and he, by virtue of his covenant and oath, is as much bound to employ all his glorious perfections for us, as we are to improve all our faculties and powers for him. What a blessed thought is this! In what an exalted view does it place religion, which, if it calls us to duties, invests us also with the most glorious privileges! It teaches us to "call upon him in every time of trouble," persuaded that "he will hear us," and give us ever increasing occasion to "glorify his name." This realizing sense of his presence, this assurance of his effectual interposition in every time of need, is the crown and summit of religion: it most of all glorifies God, and insures beyond a doubt the richest testimonies of his approbation.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. How to estimate aright our own character—

[It is not by negative virtues, no, nor by positive virtues of an external kind, that we are to judge of ourselves, but by the disposition of our minds towards God. We may be able to say with the Pharisee, "I am no extortioner, not unjust, no adulterer;" and may be able also to add with him, "I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that I possess;" and yet be odious characters

[o] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [p] Mal. i. 6. [q] Rom. xii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 20.

characters in the sight of God. If we would not deceive ourselves, we must inquire into the sense we have of our obligations to him, the determination we feel to approve ourselves faithful to him in the whole extent of our duty, and the confidence with which we are enabled to cast our care on him for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. Without *this*, whatever else we may possess, we are only "as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals:" and "if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. We must therefore prove our own selves, that so we may have rejoicing in ourselves, and not another[r]."]

2. How to secure a favourable testimony from your God—

[Man may easily be deceived: but God will assuredly judge according to truth. He "weigheth," not the actions only, but "the spirits" of men. And when he shall come at the last day, as he certainly will, in majesty and glory infinitely more terrible than that displayed at Sinaï, he will testify of us before the assembled universe: and it will be a small matter that he has not to lay to our charge a neglect of outward services, if he have to accuse us of a want of those holy dispositions which we should have entertained and exercised towards him.

We intreat you then, Brethren, to look well to the state and habit of your minds: see to it, that you "delight yourselves in God; that your whole life be a life of faith in him, of love towards him, and of zeal for the glory of his name: and, whilst you are presenting to him your own bodies and souls as a living sacrifice, present to him that great sacrifice which was once offered on Mount Calvary for the sins of the whole world, and which alone can avail for your final acceptance with him. Much as he despises the blood of bulls and goats, he will not despise the blood of his only dear Son; but will, for the sake of it, pardon all your sins, and accept, yea and reward too with everlasting happiness and glory, all your imperfect services.]

[r] Gal. vi. 3, 4.

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## CCCLL.

### SIN AN OFFENCE AGAINST GOD.

Ps. li. 4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

THE occasion of this psalm is well known: it refers to one of the most melancholy transactions that ever

ever took place in the world. In point of enormity, the deed is almost without a parallel; because it was performed by a man who till that time had made the highest professions of religion, and had been characterized even by God himself as "the man after God's own heart[a]." But it is not the crime which David committed, but only the repentance which followed it, that is the subject of our present consideration. For a long time his heart was hardened: but after that Nathan had come from God to accuse and condemn him, he yielded to the conviction, and humbled himself before God in dust and ashes. In this psalm is recorded the prayer which David offered unto God on that occasion: and it was given by David to the Church, that it might be a pattern, and an encouragement, to penitents in all future ages. The particular declaration in our text is introduced as an aggravation of his guilt. We are not however to interpret it so strictly, as if the crime which David had committed were really *no* offence against man; for in that view it was as heinous as can possibly be conceived: it was a sin against Bathsheba, whom he had defiled; against Uriah, whom he had murdered; against Joab, whom he had made an instrument to effect the murder; against all the soldiers, who were murdered at the same time; against the friends and relatives of all who were slain; against his own army, who were hereby weakened and discouraged; against the whole nation, whose interests were hereby endangered; against the Church of God, who were hereby scandalized; and the ungodly world, who were hereby hardened in their iniquities. It was "a sin also against his whole body[b]." We must therefore understand the expression rather as comparative; as if it had been said, "Against thee, thee *chiefly*, have I sinned." Nevertheless, as an offence against God, the enormity of the crime is so great, as almost to swallow

[a] If this were the subject of a *Magdalen Sermon*, it would be proper *in a delicate manner* to enlarge somewhat on the crime itself.

[b] 1 Cor. vi. 18.

swallow up and annihilate every other consideration of it, as the meridian sun reduces to non-existence, as it were, the twinkling of a star. It is from *this* consideration of it that *every* sin derives its chief enormity. Dropping therefore any further reference to David's crime, we shall endeavour to shew in general,

I. The malignity of sin as an offence against God—

Men in general think little of sin, except as it affects the welfare of society: as an offence against God, it is scarcely ever deemed worthy of notice. But every sin, of whatever kind, necessarily strikes at God himself: it implies,

1. A forgetfulness of his presence—

[He is omnipresent; nor is any thing hid from his all-seeing eye — — — But, when we commit sin, we lose all recollection that God's eye is upon us: we say in our hearts, "The Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it[c]:" "How shall God know? Is there knowledge with the Most High[d]?" "Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he cannot see[e]." This is no deduction of ours, but the declaration of God himself: and the truth of it is evident: for, if even the presence of a fellow-creature is sufficient to overawe men, so that they cannot perpetrate crimes to which they are most strongly tempted; much more would the presence of Almighty God restrain us, if we were conscious that he was inspecting and witnessing all the secrets of our hearts.]

2. A contempt of his authority—

[God, as the great Lawgiver, requires obedience to his laws, every one of which bears the impress of divine authority upon it. But in violating his commands, we trample on his authority, and say in effect, "I am at my own disposal: who is Lord over me[f]?" "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice[g]:" "I will not have this man to reign over me[h]." We have a striking exemplification of this in the conduct of the Jews, who, contrary to God's command, would go down into Egypt: "As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, (said they to Jeremiah,) we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth[i]." Thus, as God himself says, "We not only forget him, but cast him behind our back[k]."]

3. A

[c] Ps. xciv. 7.
[d] Ps. lxxiii. 11.
[e] Job xxii. 13, 14.
[f] Ps. xii. 4.
[g] Exod. v. 2.
[h] Luke xix. 14.
[i] Jer. xliv. 16, 17.
[k] Ezek. xxiii. 35.

3. A disbelief of his truth—

[God has spoken frequently respecting his determination to punish sin: he has said, that "he will by no means clear the guilty;" and that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished." Now, if we truly believed his word, we could not rush into sin: the apprehension of such tremendous consequences would deter us from it. But we are hardened by unbelief. Unbelief was the source of all the Israelites' rebellions in the wilderness[l]; and it is the fruitful spring of all our disobedience: "Ye shall not surely die," is at the root of every evil we commit[m]. But "God is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good[n]?" Let us bear this in mind, that in the commission of sin, and the expectation of impunity, we "make God himself a liar[o]."]

4. A denial of his justice—

[God has represented himself as "a God of judgment, by whom actions are weighed[p];" and has declared his purpose to "call every work into judgment," and to "judge every man according to his works." But, in violating his laws, "we say, in fact, God will not require it[q]:" "The Lord is altogether such an one as ourselves[r];" "he will not do good, neither will he do evil[s]." What an indignity is this to offer to the Governor of the Universe, the Judge of quick and dead! He has spoken of the last day as "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God:" but, if the issue of it were such as we expect, and heaven were awarded to wilful and impenitent transgressors, it would rather be a day wherein God's *want of* justice and of holiness shall be displayed before the whole assembled universe.]

5. A defiance of his power—

[Men who commit iniquity are represented as "stretching out their hands against God, and strengthening themselves against the Almighty; yea, as running upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his buckler[t]:" and to what a fearful extent this is done, we may see by the testimony of God himself: They, the workers of iniquity, "say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it[u]." Does this appear an exaggerated account of men's impiety? See then how they are described by the Psalmist:

[l] Ps. cvi. 24. Heb. iii. 19.
[m] Gen. iii. 4.
[n] Numb. xxiii. 19.
[o] 1 John v. 10.
[p] 1 Sam. ii. 3.
[q] Ps. x. 13.
[r] Ps. l. 21.
[s] Zeph. i. 12.
[t] Job xv. 25, 26.
[u] Isai. v. 19.

Psalmist: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above, out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he *puffeth at* them[x]." What an astonishing height of impiety is this; to *puff at* God's threatenings, as if we defied him to his face! yet do we see that this is the very conduct of men, whenever we warn them to flee from the wrath to come: we seem to menace them with judgments which they have no cause to fear, and to set in array against them an enemy whom they are at liberty to despise.]

When once we view sin as an offence against God, we shall be prepared to acknowledge,

II. The equity of his judgments which he has denounced against it—

That God has denounced the heaviest judgments against it, is certain—

[*Against sin in general* he has denounced eternal misery: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[y]———*Against every individual that commits it*, he has also denounced his judgments: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die[z]"———*Against every particular sin*, whatever be men's excuses for retaining it, the same awful sentence is proclaimed[a]——— Death, everlasting death, is the wages due to sin[b], and the wages that shall be paid to every sinner at the last day[c]———]

In executing these he will be completely justified—

[We are ready to account such denunciations of wrath severe, and to question the equity of them——— But the *penal evil* of damnation will not appear in the least to exceed the *moral evil* of sin, if we duly consider against whom sin is committed.

Consider *his greatness*. "Great is the Lord," says the Psalmist, "yea, his greatness is unsearchable." If we could conceive the meanest reptile, or the smallest insect, endued with such a measure of intelligence as to be able in some degree to appreciate the dignity of a mighty monarch; and then to exalt itself against him, and to pour all manner of contempt upon him; the atrocity of such presumption would justly excite our keenest indignation. But the whole universe together is not as the smallest insect in comparison of God; and yet we, we atom insects of an atom world, dare to set ourselves against his divine majesty, yea, to defy him to his face. Will God then be unjust if he execute his judgments on such impious worms? Are we at liberty

[x] Ps. x. 4, 5. [y] Ps. ix. 17. Rom. i. 18.
[z] Ezek. xviii. 20. 1 Pet. i. 17. [a] Mark ix. 42—48.
[b] Rom. vi. 23. [c] Matt. xxv. 46.

liberty to insult him; and is he not at liberty to avenge himself on us? — — —

But consider also *his goodness*. O how unbounded has this been! How has he borne with us in all our rebellion! How has he sent his only-begotten Son, to expiate our sin, and to open a way for our reconciliation with him! How has he sought to glorify in our salvation those very perfections, which we have so impiously despised, and which he might well glorify in our everlasting condemnation! How has he sent his Holy Spirit, to instruct, renew, and comfort us! How has he sent his word and Ministers, to invite, intreat, expostulate, yea, and, as it were, to "compel us" to accept of mercy! This he has done from our youth up: this he is doing yet daily and hourly: and, as if all his own happiness were bound up in ours, he says, "How shall I give thee up?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? Oh! when shall it once be?" This is the God against whom we are sinning. This is the God whom we wish extinct[d]; and respecting whom we say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." This is he, "whose blessed Son we trample under foot, and to whose eternal Spirit we do despite[e]:" yea, that very "goodness and long-suffering and forbearance which should lead us to repentance," are made by us an occasion of multiplying our offences against him. Say now whether he will "be unrighteous in taking vengeance?" Were a fellow-creature to make such returns to us, and to render nothing but evil to us for all the good we did him, should we think that he had any claim on us? Should we account ourselves unjust, if we did not acknowledge him as one of our dearest friends, and place him on a footing with our own beloved children, and make him an heir of all that we possessed? Should we not feel ourselves amply justified in rejecting such an absurd and groundless claim as this? Know then, that *we* have no claim on God; and, when he shall exclude us from the inheritance of his saints, "he will be justified" in the judgment that he shall denounce against us. Indeed, in assigning us this portion, he will only give effect to our own wishes, and answer us in the desire of our own hearts: we said to him, "Depart from *us;* we desire not the knowledge of thee[f];" and he will say to us, "Depart from *me;* depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels[g]."]

## The whole creation will unite in vindicating these judgments as just and good—

[Doubtless, if it were possible, sinners would urge at the bar of judgment the objections which here they presume to bring against the justice of their God. But sin will then appear in all its

[d] Ps. xiv. 1. Omitting the words in Italics. [e] Heb. x. 29.
[f] Job xxi. 14. [g] Matt. xxv. 41.

its deformity: it will then be seen, what a God we sinned against, and what mercies we despised. Even in this world, when once persons are brought to view themselves aright, they justify God in all that he sees fit to inflict upon them[gg]. Aaron[h], Eli[i], Hezekiah[k], David[l], all confessed, that God had a right to deal with them in the way that he had done. Much more in the day of judgment, when every thing will be seen in its true light, will the whole universe approve the sentence which God shall pass on the world of the ungodly: they will make the very punishment of the wicked a subject of their songs; "saying, Allelujah! salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments[m]." Indeed the miserable objects themselves, though they cannot join in the song, will be unable to condemn the sentence. The man who was excluded from the marriage-feast for not having on a wedding garment, might have urged, that he was brought in before he had time to procure one: but his plea would have been false and unavailing; and therefore "he was speechless[n];" a striking monument of conscious guilt, and an awful specimen of a condemned soul[o].]

In this acknowledgment then of David we may SEE,

1. The grand constituents of repentance—

[Many may be sorry that they have subjected themselves to punishment, just as a criminal may that he has forfeited his life to the laws of his country: but no man can truly repent, till he sees, that his whole life has been one continued state of rebellion against God; and that "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" is his just desert. Till a man has that view of himself, he will never be thoroughly broken and contrite; he will never lothe and abhor himself for his iniquities; he will never have that "repentance which is unto life, that repentance which is not to be repented of." We intreat you all then to judge of your repentance by these marks. Do not be satisfied with being humbled on account of sin; but inquire particularly, whether you are more humbled from a view of it as against *man*, or a view of it as against *God*. These ought to bear no proportion in your estimate of your own character. Your own nothingness and vileness can only be estimated aright, when viewed in contrast with the majesty you have offended, and the mercy you have despised: and till you see that everlasting

[gg] It is worthy of observation, that God's goodness to David is mentioned as the greatest aggravation of his offence. 2 Sam. xii. 7—9.

[h] Lev. x. 3. [i] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [k] Isai. xxxix. 8.
[l] Ps. xxxix. 9. [m] Rev. xv. 3. & xix. 1, 2.
[n] Matt. xxii. 12. [o] Rom. iii. 19.

lasting misery in hell is your deserved portion, you can never lie so low as you ought to lie.]

2. The true preparative for pardon—

[Something we *must* bring with us to the Saviour: but what is that which we ought to bring? Must we get a certain portion of good works wherewith to purchase his salvation? No: this is a price which he will utterly despise. That which we are to bring is precisely what a patient brings to a physician, a sense of his extreme need of the physician's aid. Christ came to save sinners: we then must feel ourselves sinners. He came to seek and save that which was lost: we then must feel ourselves lost. A just sense of our guilt and misery is all that he requires: if we come wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked, he will give us that gold that has been tried in the fire, the raiment that shall cover our nakedness, and the eye-salve that shall restore our eyes to sight. If we come to him *full*, we shall be sent empty away: but if we come hungry and empty, we shall "be filled out of his inexhaustible fulness," we shall "be filled with all the fulness of our God."]

3. The best preservative from sin—

[When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he answered her, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God[p]?" Thus we would recommend all, when tempted to commit iniquity, to consider, first, what God will think of it; and next, what they themselves will think of it in the last day? *Now* it may appear light and venial, especially if it be not such an heinous sin as adultery or murder: but when it comes to be seen in its true light, as against an infinitely good and gracious God; and when the judgments which he has denounced against it come to be felt; what shall we think of it then? Oh! ask yourselves, What will be my view of this matter in the last day? Then even the sins that now seem of no account, will appear most heinous, and the price paid for a momentary indulgence, most prodigal. The selling of a birthright for a mess of pottage was but a very faint emblem of the folly of those, who for the whole world are induced to barter the salvation of their souls. View things in any measure now, as you will view them at the last day, and you will rather die a thousand deaths than sin against your God.]

[p] Gen. xxxix. 9.

## CCCLXXI.

### ORIGINAL SIN.

Ps. li. 5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

ONE of the most essential marks of real penitence is, a disposition to see our sins as God sees them; not extenuating their guilt by vain and frivolous excuses, but marking every circumstance that tends to aggravate their enormity. During their impenitence, our first parents cast the blame of their transgression upon others; the man on his wife; and the woman on the serpent that had beguiled her: but, when true repentance was given them, they no doubt beheld their conduct in a very different view, and took to themselves all the shame which it so justly merited. The sin of David in the matter of Uriah was great, beyond all the powers of language to express. Yet there were points of view in which none but a real penitent would notice it, and in which its enormity was aggravated an hundred-fold. This is the light in which the Royal Penitent speaks of it, in the psalm before us. Having spoken of it as an offence, not merely against man, but primarily, and almost solely, against Jehovah himself, he proceeds to notice it, not as an insulated act or course of action, but as the proper fruit of his inherent, his natural, corruption. We are not to suppose, that he intended by this to cast any reflection on his mother, of whom he elsewhere speaks in most respectful terms; nor are we to imagine, that he adduces the nature which he had derived from her, as an excuse for the wickedness he had committed: his intention is, to humble himself before God and man as a creature altogether corrupt, and to represent his wickedness as no other than a sample of that iniquity of which his heart was full, a stream issuing from an overflowing fountain. This, we doubt not, is the genuine import of the words which we have now proposed to consider; "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived me."

In

In prosecuting this important subject, we shall endeavour to establish,

I. The truth asserted—

The doctrine of Original Sin is here distinctly affirmed. It is indeed by many denied, under the idea that it would be inconsistent with the goodness and mercy of God to send into the world immortal Beings in any other state than one of perfect purity. But it is in vain for us to teach God what he *ought* to do: the question for us to consider, is, What hath God done? and what account has he himself given us of our state? And here, if the Scriptures be true, there is no room for doubt: we are the corrupt offspring of degenerate parents; from whom we derive a polluted nature, which alone, since their fall, they could possibly transmit. This we shall proceed to prove,

1. From concurring testimonies—

[*Moses*, in his account of the first man that was born into the world, expressly notices, that Adam begat him not in the likeness of God, in which he himself had been originally created, but "in *his own* likeness," as a fallen and corrupt creature[a]: and how different the one from the other, may be conjectured from the conduct of this first-born, who imbrued his hands in his brother's blood. In his account too, as well of the post-diluvian, as of the ante-diluvian world, he tells us, that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually[b]." *Job*, not only affirms the same awful truth, but shews us that it is impossible in the nature of things to be otherwise; since from a thing that is radically and essentially unclean, nothing but what is unclean can proceed[c]. The testimony of *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah* is altogether to the same effect[d]; as is that also of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes[e]. And, in the New Testament, our Lord himself teaches us to regard the heart as the proper womb, where every species of iniquity is generated, and from whence it proceeds[f]: and *St. Paul* declares of himself, as well as all the rest of the human race, that they "are *by nature* children of wrath[g]." But how can we be in such a state *by nature*, if we are not corrupt? Can God regard as objects of his wrath creatures that possess his perfect image? No: it is as

[a] Gen. v. 3. [b] Gen. vi. 5. & viii. 21.
[c] Job xiv. 4. & xv. 14—16. & xxv. 4. [d] Isai. vi. 5. Jer. xvii. 9.
[e] Eccl. ix. 3. [f] Mark vii. 21. [g] Eph. ii. 3.

as fallen in Adam that he views us, and as inheriting a depraved nature that he abhors us[h].]

2. From collateral evidence—

[Whence was it that God appointed *the* painful and bloody *rite of circumcision* to be administered to infants of eight days old, but to shew that they brought into the world with them a corrupt nature, which it was the bounden duty of all who were in covenant with him to mortify and subdue? Whilst, on the one hand, it sealed to them the blessings of the covenant, it intimated to them, on the other hand, that they needed to have "their hearts circumcised, to love the Lord their God."

Again, how comes it that *every child*, from the first moment that he begins to act at all, *manifests corrupt tempers and dispositions?* If only some, and those the children of wicked men, evinced such depravity, we might be led to account for it in some other way: but when, with the exception of one or two who were sanctified from the womb, this has been the state of every child that has been born into the world, we are constrained to acknowledge, that our very nature is corrupt, and that, as David tells us, "we are estranged from the womb, and go astray as soon as we are born[i]."

Further, How can we account for *the sufferings and death of infants*, but on the supposition, that they are partakers of Adam's guilt and corruption? Sufferings and death are the penalty of sin: and we cannot conceive that God would inflict that penalty on millions of infants, if they were not in some way or other obnoxious to his wrath. St. Paul notices this, as an irrefragable proof that all Adam's posterity fell in him, and through him are partakers of guilt and misery[k].

Once more; Whence is it that *all need a Saviour?* If children are not in the eye of God transgressors of his law, they cannot need to be redeemed from its curse. But Christ is as much the Saviour of infants as of adults. We find no intimation in the Scriptures that any are saved without him: on the contrary, it is said, that, "as in Adam *all* died, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive." In the temple shewn to Ezekiel, there was one door for the prince: it was the door by which the Lord God had entered; and was to be for ever closed to all except the prince[l]. So Christ alone enters into heaven by his own merits: to all besides him that door is closed: and Christ alone is the door by which *we* must enter in; he is the only way to the Father; nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any child of man come unto the Father, but by him[m].

These

[h] The subject does not lead us to notice Adam as *a federal head*; and therefore we confine ourselves to what lies immediately before us.

[i] Ps. lviii. 3. [k] Rom. v. 12, 14. [l] Ezek. xliv. 2, 3.

[m] John x. 9. & xiv. 6.

These things then, especially, as taken in connexion with the many express declarations before quoted, are decisive proofs, that David's account of himself was true, and that it is equally true of all the human race.]

This truth being established, we proceed to mark,

II. The importance of adverting to it in estimating our state before God—

Unless we bear in mind the total corruption of our nature, we can never estimate aright,

1. Our individual actions—

[Even in common courts of judicature, the great object of inquiry is, not so much *the act* that has been done, as *the mind* of the agent: and, according as that appears to have been depraved or blameless, the sentence of condemnation or acquittal is passed upon him. Precisely thus must we judge ourselves in our conduct towards God. To elucidate this part of our subject, we will suppose two persons to have been guilty of the same *act* of treason towards an earthly sovereign, but to have differed widely from each other in respect of *the mind* with which they acted: one entered upon it *unwittingly*, and without any consciousness that he was doing wrong: the other *knowingly*, and aware that he was rebelling against his lawful sovereign. One did it *reluctantly*, through the influence of one whom he could not easily withstand; but the other *willingly*, as a volunteer in the service, and as following the impulse of his own mind. One went *without premeditation*, being taken hastily and off his guard: the other *with a fixed purpose*, after much plotting and deliberation. In one it was *a solitary act*, altogether contrary to the whole of his former life: in the other it was *frequent*, as often as the temptation arose, or the occasion offered. The one proceeded *with moderation*, not having his heart at all engaged in it: the other *with a fiery zeal*, abhorring in his soul the authority he opposed. The one had *his mind open to conviction*, and might easily be prevailed upon to renounce his error: the other was *filled with self-approbation and self-applause*, thinking nothing of his risks and dangers, if he might but help forward the utter subversion of the Government.—Take these two persons, and say, whether, notwithstanding their acts were in appearance the same, there would not be an immense difference between the measure of their criminality in the estimation of an upright judge? There can be no doubt on this subject. Take then any other sin whatever, (for all sin is treason against the King of kings;) and examine how far it has been voluntary, deliberate, habitual; how far it has been against light and knowledge; and how far it has proceeded from a heart radically averse to God and holiness. Let sins of omission be examined in this way, as well

well as sins of commission: and then the things which now are accounted light and venial, will appear hateful in the extreme, not merely as blighted "grapes of a degenerate vine," but as "grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah:" their enormity will be felt, in proportion to the strength and fixedness of the principle from which they spring.]

2. Our general character—

[If our actions have not been openly sinful, we are ready to bless ourselves as having but little ground for shame and remorse. But if we consider "the enmity of the carnal mind against God," and view our utter want of all holy affections, and exceeding proneness to some besetting sins, we shall see but little reason to glory over the vilest of mankind. We shall see abundant cause indeed for thankfulness to God, who by his preventing grace has restrained us from many evils into which others have run: but we shall take no credit to ourselves as better than others. If we behold bitter fruit produced by others, we shall remember that there is the root of it all in ourselves: if we see in others the streams of wickedness, we shall bear in mind, that the fountain of it all is in ourselves also. Thus, however free we may be from any flagrant enormity, we shall be ready to acknowledge with Paul, that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and with Job to say, "Behold, I am vile! I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes." So far from indulging self-preference and self-esteem, we shall find no names more suited to us than those by which St. Paul designated his own character, "Less than the least of all saints," and "The very chief of sinners[n]."]

From this view of our natural corruption, we may LEARN,

1. How greatly we need the renewing influence of God's Spirit—

[Outward amendment might suffice for outward sins: but, where the heart itself is so corrupt, we must have "a new heart given to us," and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds." With such hearts as ours, it would be impossible for us to enter into the kingdom of heaven, or to enjoy it even if we were there: we could not bear the sight of so holy a God; nor endure to spend our lives in such holy employments. — — — Know then, that "old things must pass away; and all things must become new." "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh:" the stream can rise no higher than the fountain head. If ye would enjoy the things of the Spirit, ye must be "born of the Spirit," who alone can impart the faculties necessary for that end. Let your prayer

[n] Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 15.

prayer then be like that of David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me[o]!"]

2. How carefully we should watch against temptation—

[If we carried about with us a load of powder which a single spark would cause to explode, we should be extremely careful to avoid whatever might subject us to danger. Should we not then, with hearts so corrupt, and with temptations so thick around us, look well to our ways, and pray unto our God to keep us from the evils of an ensnaring world? Well did our blessed Lord say, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:" "The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak." Who that reflects on David's state previous to his fall, does not fear for himself, and cry mightily unto God, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe!" "Uphold me with thy free Spirit, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me!"? To all then we say, "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

[o] ver. 10.

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## CCCLXXII.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF INWARD INTEGRITY.

Ps. li. 6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

MANKIND at large are chiefly observant of their outward conduct; but the Child of God cannot rest in externals: he is anxious about the internal habits of his soul; and desires to have them conformed to the mind and will of God. The words before us strongly express this idea. By many indeed they are interpreted, as if David intended in them to aggravate yet further the guilt he had contracted, which had been in direct opposition both to the profession he had made, and to the light he had enjoyed[a]. But we conceive that the words, as they stand in our translation, convey the true meaning of the Psalmist; and that they relate, not to *his sins*, but *his repentance for them*. The sense of them appears to be to this effect; "Thou requirest me to be

[a] In this case, the last clause is read in the past tense; "Thou *hast made* me to know."

be truly sincere in my present humiliation; and, if I am, as I desire to be, thoroughly sincere, thou wilt make this whole dispensation a source of the most important instruction to my soul." In this view of the words, they are an humble address to God, declarative of,

I. The disposition he requires—

"Truth" is a conformity of our feelings and actions to our professions: and *this* God requires of us in the whole of our spirit and conduct. He requires it,

1. In our acknowledgments—

[We confess ourselves sinners before God. But such a confession is of no value in his sight, unless it be accompanied with suitable emotions. Think then, what becomes us, as sinners: what deep sorrow and contrition should we feel for having offended Almighty God! what self-lothing and self-abhorrence for our extreme vileness and baseness! what ardent desires after mercy! what readiness to justify God in all that he may be pleased to inflict upon us in this world, whatever means or instruments he may see fit to use; yea, and in the eternal world also, even if he cast us into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and make us everlasting monuments of his wrathful indignation! *This* should be the state and habit of our minds; we should have "our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, unclean!" In a word, we should adopt from our inmost souls the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile! therefore I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes." In proportion as we feel thus, we are upright, and have "truth in our inward parts:" but so far as we are wanting in these feelings, we are "hypocrites in heart," drawing nigh to God with our lips in a way belied by our hearts[aa].]

2. In our purposes—

[We profess, as persons redeemed by the blood of our incarnate God, to give up ourselves to him, and to live unto Him who died for us: and, if we are sincere in this, our determination is fixed, that, with God's help, nothing shall ever keep us from executing this intention. We have deliberately counted the cost. We are aware, that "if we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we must suffer persecution:" but we are prepared to meet it, from whatever quarter it may come, yea, though "our greatest foes should be those of our own household." We are ready to sacrifice our reputation, our interests, and our very lives also, rather than in any respect deny our God, or suffer ourselves to be diverted

[aa] Matt. xv. 7, 8.

diverted from the path of duty. We are determined, through grace, to put away every thing that may retard our progress heavenward, and to aspire after the highest possible attainments in righteousness and true holiness. Now God requires, that we should be acting up to this profession, "setting our face as a flint against the whole world," and standing in the posture of Daniel or the Hebrew youths, willing to have our bodies consigned to a den of lions, or the fiery furnace, rather than violate our duty by any sinful compliance. If we are halting or hesitating, we have not truth in our inward parts.]

3. In our endeavours—

[Purposes must be judged of by the exertions that are put forth in order to carry them into effect. A diligent attendance therefore on all the means of grace must of necessity be required of us: in the public ordinances, and in our private chambers, whether we be hearing, or reading, or meditating, or praying, we must be like men in earnest, even like the man-slayer fleeing from the pursuer of blood, that scarcely stopped to look behind him, till he should reach the appointed sanctuary, the city of refuge. Remissness in such a cause argues a want of real integrity: if truth be indeed in our inward parts, we shall *run* as in a race, which leaves us no time to loiter; and *wrestle* with all our might, lest we be foiled in the contest; and *fight* as those who know that there is no alternative but to overcome or perish. In all the interior workings of our minds we shall resemble the Corinthians, who were "clear in this matter[aa]."]

That we may not be discouraged by the strictness of God's requirements, let us consider,

II. The benefit he will confer—

There is a wisdom that is to be gained only by experience: what has its seat in the head, may be learned by the head: what dwells in the heart, must be learned by the heart: and of the heart there is but one teacher, even God: according as it is said, "Who teacheth like God[b]:" and again, "There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding[c]."

Amongst the treasures of wisdom which God will impart to the truly upright, and the hidden things which he will cause them to know, are,

1. The

[aa] 2 Cor. vii. 11. [b] Job xxxvi. 22. [c] Job xxxii. 8.

1. The deceits of the heart—

[These are very deep, and absolutely unsearchable[d]; yet in a measure will God discover them to those who have truth in their inward parts. The world at large know nothing of them: "they are calling evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter[e]:" "they feed also on ashes: *a deceived heart* hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand[f]?" They contrive to satisfy their minds that all is well with them, or at least to lull their consciences asleep with the hope that all will be well with them before they die. They have a thousand pleas and excuses which they urge in their own defence, and which they vainly hope will be accepted by their Judge. If we attempt to open their eyes, they reply, with indignation, "Are we blind also[g]?" Thus are they both blinded and "hardened" through the deceitfulness of sin. But those who are really "Israelites indeed, and without guile," have their eyes opened to see what delusions they have cherished: and being thus "brought out of darkness into marvellous light," they find that promise fulfilled to them, "They that erred in spirit shall come to understanding[h]." "Their eye being made single, their whole body is full of light."]

2. The devices of Satan—

[The men of this world, though "taken in his snares, and led captive by him at his will," have no idea of his agency. But he is a subtle adversary; and his "wiles" are innumerable. He can even "transform himself into an angel of light[i];" and, when aiming a deadly blow at our souls, assume the garb of "a Minister of righteousness." His first device is, to persuade men that they are in no danger of the judgments they fear. If he fail in that, he will instil into their minds the notion that they have gone too far, and that there is no hope for them. If that snare do not succeed, he will draw them aside, after some points of less importance, or matters of doubtful disputation. Multitudes of false apostles has he at his command, who will gladly aid him in this accursed work[k], and concur with him in his endeavours to "corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ[l]." But, if we are following the Lord fully, he will not leave us "ignorant of Satan's devices, or suffer him to get his wished-for advantage over us[m]." He will arm us against that adversary, and enable us to withstand him[n]. He will give us "the shield of faith, whereby we shall ward off and quench all his fiery darts[o]," and be able so to "resist him, that he shall flee from us[p]."]

3. The

[d] Jer. xvii. 9. [e] Isai. v. 20. [f] Isai. xliv. 20. [g] John ix. 40.
[h] Isai. xxix. 24. [i] 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14. [k] ib.
[l] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [m] 2 Cor. ii. 11. [n] Eph. vi. 11. [o] ib. ver. 16.
[p] Jam. iv. 7.

3. The mysteries of grace—

[" Great is the mystery of godliness," and great the mystery of grace, whether we consider the work *wrought for* us by Jesus Christ, or the work *wrought in* us by his Holy Spirit. These constitute that " wisdom, which is foolishness with man," and which " the natural man cannot receive, because it is spiritually discerned[q]." To know this, we must be taught of God: " We must receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us of God[r]." And oh! how wonderful a work does this appear, when " God shines into our hearts to reveal it to us[s]!" How worthy of God! how suitable to man! how passing the comprehension, whether of men or angels! Verily, the man whose eyes are thus opened, seems to be brought into a new world: " old things are passed away, and all things are become new." The ignorant world are amazed at the new line of conduct he pursues, just as Elisha's servant was at his master's confidence in the midst of danger. But, if their eyes were opened to see, as the Believer does, the invisible God[t] above him and within him, they would wonder rather, that there were any bounds to his transports, or any limit to his exertions.]

4. The beauties of holiness—

[All who are warped by their prejudices, or blinded by their lusts, are incapable of estimating aright the beauty and blessedness of true piety: it appears to them little short of madness. And even those who make a profession of godliness, but possess not truth in their inward parts, have very erroneous conceptions of true holiness. Some place it in a confident espousal of certain principles, or a zealous attachment to a particular party: others, inclining more to practical religion, make all duty to centre in some one point, such as the mortification of the flesh, or almsgiving, or penances of man's invention. Even those who are more enlightened, are apt to regard only one particular *set of graces* that are more congenial with their own feelings, and to neglect those which are of an opposite aspect; one despising every thing in comparison of zeal and confidence; another leaning altogether to the side of prudence and timidity. But the man into whose hidden part God has put true wisdom, views holiness, not with prismatic partiality, separating one grace from another, but all embodied, as light in the sun; every grace tempering its opposite, and all combining to the production of perfect beauty. He discards neither the vivid nor the darker ray: but, having all in united exercise, sorrow with joy, and fear with confidence, " the beauty of the Lord his God is upon him[u]," and

[q] 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 9, 14. [r] ib. ver. 10, 12. [s] 2 Cor. iv. 6.
[t] 2 Kin. vi. 15—17. Heb. xi. 27. [u] Ps. xc. 17.

and he shines "in the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness[x]."]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. Whence it is that men get so little insight into the Gospel—

[Many hear the Gospel during their whole lives, and never attain any just knowledge of it. How shall we account for this? We suppose the Gospel to be preached with all possible fidelity, and yet it seems never to convey any light to their minds. The reason is, that they never take any pains to apply it to their own souls, or to get any one truth realized in their own experience. They assent to every thing they hear; but they are content with being hearers, without ever once attempting to become doers of the word they hear. They "see perhaps their face, as in a glass for the moment; but they go away, and forget what manner of men they are[y]." But our blessed Lord has told us, that we must aim at doing his will, in order to get any just insight into what he has revealed[z]: and, as this desire is altogether wanting in the persons we are speaking of, they never derive any solid benefit from the Gospel. O Brethren! you must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls." You must apply the word to your own hearts: when you hear your sins pointed out, you must endeavour to humble yourselves for them in dust and ashes: when you hear of Christ as the one only Saviour of a ruined world, you must endeavour to flee to him for refuge: when the Holy Ghost is set forth as the one great source of all spiritual life and motion, you must cry to God the Father for his dear Son's sake to send the Holy Spirit into your hearts, that the whole work of grace may be wrought within you. It is your neglect of thus harrowing in the seed by meditation, and of watering it with tears, that has given Satan an opportunity of taking it out of your hearts as soon as ever it has been sown there[a]. Get the "honest and the good heart," which truly desires to make a just improvement of the word, and God will yet cause the seed to spring up in your hearts, and to bring forth fruit to the salvation of your souls.]

2. Whence it is that many who profess the Gospel are so little ornaments to it—

[It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness walk very unworthy of their high calling. Like Ezekiel's hearers, they are gratified with the preaching of the Gospel, as persons are with "one who plays well upon an instrument; but their heart still goeth after their covetousness[b]," or some other besetting

[x] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [y] Jam. i. 22—25. [z] John vii. 17.
[a] Matt. xiii. 4, 19. [b] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

setting sin. But this is owing to their not having "truth in their inward parts:" if they had, they would not be satisfied with professing the Gospel, and talking about it, and looking with pity (or perhaps with contempt) on those who do not understand it: no; they would look to their spirit, that it should be meek and humble; they would look to their conduct also, that it should be blameless and without guile: they would "give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Ah Brethren! think what God requires of all, and of those who make a profession of religion more especially: and beg of God to endue your souls with truth and wisdom, "that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ." You may fancy that you "know all the depths of Satan[c]:" but if your professed "hope in Christ does not purify your souls as Christ is pure[d]," you are yet blinded by him, and utterly deceiving your own souls[e].]

3. How to get the whole work of God perfected in our souls—

[Come to the Gospel with hearts tender and contrite, that they may be to it as wax to the seal. Then shall you have in your own souls "the witness" of all its most important truths[f]: and shall be able to answer from your own experience that question which God puts so triumphantly to all the world; "Doth not my word do good to him that walketh uprightly?" You are not straitened in God: be not straitened in your own souls. Desire much: ask much: expect much: and God will supply your every want according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."]

[c] Rev. ii. 24. [d] 1 John iii. 3.
[e] Jam. i. 26. [f] 1 John v. 10.

## CCCLXXIII.

### A BROKEN HEART THE BEST SACRIFICE.

Ps. li. 16, 17. *Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

"WHEREWITHAL shall I come before the Lord?" is the first inquiry that will be made by an awakened sinner. No sooner were the murderers of our Lord "pricked to the heart" with a conviction of their guilt, than they cried out, (the whole assembly of them

them together), "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In answer to this, man proposes many costly offerings; and for the obtaining of peace would present unto God any thing that he should require[a]. Had God required sacrifices to be offered for David's sins, he would gladly have offered them, however numerous or costly they had been: "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it thee." But there is one thing only required, and *that* universally of all people under heaven; and what that is, we are informed in the words before us: "The sacrifices of God, &c."

Here are two points to be inquired into;

I. What is that sacrifice which God approves—

The term "sacrifice" is metaphorically applied to many things; to praise and thanksgivings[aa]; to alms-deeds[b]; to a surrender of the soul to God[c]. But in our text it does not so much refer to any offerings whereby a pardoned sinner may honour God, as to that disposition of mind whereby an unpardoned sinner may facilitate his acceptance with God. As to any external services, David informs us that these would not answer the desired end: for though many offerings under the law were appointed and approved of God as typical of the great sacrifice, yet were they in themselves of no value[d], especially when compared with obedience[e]; and, when substituted for obedience, they were hateful and abominable in the sight of God[f]. For such sins as David's there was actually no sacrifice appointed: no penalty less than death could be awarded to the person that was found guilty either of adultery or murder[g]. But there is a sacrifice which will forward the acceptance even of such an atrocious sinner as David: it is called in our text, "A broken and contrite heart." To ascertain what is meant by this, let us consider,

1. The

[a] Mic. vi. 6, 7. [aa] Heb. xiii. 15. [b] ib. ver. 16.
[c] Rom. xii. 1. [d] Ps. l. 8—14. [e] 1 Sam. xv. 22. Hos. vi. 6.
[f] Isai. i. 11—15. & lxvi. 3. & Am. v. 21—23.
[g] Numb. xxxv. 31. Deut. xxii. 22.

1. The term—

[We all have some idea of what is meant by "a broken heart," when applied to worldly sorrow. It signifies a person overwhelmed with sorrow to such a degree, that he is always bowed down under its weight, and incapable of receiving consolation from any thing but the actual removal of his burthens. *Thus far* it may serve to illustrate the meaning of our text, and to shew what is meant by an heart broken with a sense of sin——— But in other respects there is an exceeding great difference between the two: for an heart broken with worldly troubles, argues an ignorance of our own demerit—a want of resignation to God—a want of affiance in him—and a low esteem of those benefits which sanctified affliction is calculated to produce——— In these respects therefore it forms a contrast, rather than a resemblance, to true contrition.

Let us then drop the *term*, and consider the *thing*.]

2. The thing—

["A broken and a contrite heart" consists in a deep sense of our guilt and misery—a self-lothing and abhorrence on account of the peculiar aggravations of our sin, (as committed against a gracious God and a merciful Redeemer,)—a readiness to justify God in his dealings with us, whatever they be,—and such an insatiable desire after mercy, as swallows up every other sensation, whether of joy or sorrow.———

View all of these things distinctly and separately—compare them with the workings of David's mind as set forth in this psalm[h]———view them as illustrated by other portions of Holy Writ[i]———and the more they are considered, the more will they discover to us the precise nature of that sacrifice which is described in the text.]

Let us now proceed to inquire,

II. Why God honours it with his peculiar favour—

That God does signally honour it, is certain—

[When it is said that "a broken and contrite heart God will not *despise*," more is meant than is expressed: it means, that God will honour it with tokens of his peculiar approbation. Whoever he be that offers to him this sacrifice, God will *notice him*, even though there were only one in the universe, and he the meanest and vilest of mankind. Not all the angels in heaven should so occupy his attention as to prevent him from searching out

[h] ver. 3, 4. ib. 7—9.

[i] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. Job xl. 4. & xlii. 6. with Zech. xii. 10. Luke xv. 18, 19. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. or all together, 2 Cor. vii. 11. or as exemplified in other of David's Psalms, Ps. xxxviii. 4—10. & xl. 12. Perhaps it will be best to confine the illustrations to Ps. li. & xxxviii. for fear of swelling this part of the subject too much.

out that person, and keeping his eye continually fixed upon him for good[k]———Moreover, God will *comfort him;* he will not merely view him from heaven, but will come down and dwell in his heart on purpose to comfort and revive him[l]———Nor is this all; for God will surely and eternally *save him*[m]: and the more abased the man is in his own eyes, the higher will God exalt him on a throne of glory[n]———]

And the reasons of his so honouring it are plain—

[*It is the work of his own Spirit on the soul of man.* No created power can effect it: we may break and bruise the body, but we can never produce in any one a broken and contrite spirit. This is God's prerogative[o]; and whoever has obtained this blessing must say, "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God[p]."—Again, *It is the precise disposition that becomes us.* If the holy angels that never sinned veil their faces and their feet in the presence of their God, what prostration of mind must become such guilty creatures as we are! Surely we must "put our hands on our mouth, and our mouth in the dust, crying, Unclean, unclean[q]!" yea rather, we should gird us with sackcloth, and wallow ourselves in ashes, and make mourning as for an only son, even most bitter lamentation[r]."—Further, *It disposes us to acquiesce cordially in God's appointed method of recovery.* Till we are thoroughly broken-hearted with a sense of sin, we never estimate aright the unspeakable blessings of Redemption. We may profess a regard for the Gospel; but we do not really "glory in the cross of Christ;" Christ does not truly become "all our salvation and all our desire." But to the truly contrite, O how precious is the name of Jesus, that adorable name, the foundation of all our hopes, the source of all our joys! —Lastly, *It invariably stimulates us to a cheerful unreserved obedience.* No commandment is hard to a person, when once his heart is truly broken and contrite. Let us see that we were dead, and that Christ died for us; and a sense of "his love will constrain us to live to him," and to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his."

Say now, whether here be not reason sufficient for the distinguished favours which God vouchsafes to the contrite soul? We know that there is nothing *meritorious* in contrition: but there is in it a suitableness for the reception of the Divine mercies, and for the reflecting back upon God the honour which he confers upon it.]

This subject may well be IMPROVED,

1. For

[k] Isai. lxvi. 2.
[l] Isai. lvii. 15.
[m] Ps. xxxiv. 18. Job xxxiii. 27, 28.
[n] Luke xviii. 14.
[o] Job xl. 11. Ezek. xi. 19.
[p] 2 Cor. v. 5.
[q] Lam. iii. 29. with Lev. xiii. 45.
[r] Jer. vi. 26. with Jam. iv. 9, 10.

1. For the conviction of the impenitent—

[Worldly sorrow has more or less been the portion of us all: but how few have "sorrowed after a godly sort!" The generality have never laid to heart their sins at all: and they who have felt some compunction, have for the most part been satisfied with a little transient sorrow, and something of an outward reformation of life. But let this be remembered, that when it is said, "God will *not* despise the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, it is manifestly implied, that he *will* despise every thing short of that. Do not then deceive yourselves with an expectation that God will accept your feigned or partial humiliation: your penitence must be deep, and your change radical: your sorrow for sin must far exceed any worldly sorrow, and must bring you incessantly to the foot of the cross, as your only refuge and your only hope: nor will any repentance short of this be "a repentance unto salvation, but only a repentance eternally to be repented of[s]."]

2. For consolation to the penitent—

[When once you become truly penitent, *men* will begin to despise you: they will look upon you as a poor weak enthusiast, and will "cast out your name as evil"——— But your comfort is, that *God* will not despise you. If the Psalmist had merely *affirmed* this, it would have been a rich ground of consolation: but he makes it a matter of *appeal* to God; "A broken and contrite spirit, *thou, O God,* will not despise." What a glorious truth! When you are so vile and contemptible in your own eyes that you blush and are confounded before God, and "dare not even lift up your eyes unto heaven," God looks upon you with pleasure and complacency, and acknowledges you as his dearly beloved child[t]. Do you want evidence of this? See for whom God sent his only-begotten Son into the world[u]; and read the account given of *the very first sermon that Jesus ever preached*[x]: and hear to whom in particular he addressed his invitations[y]: consider these, I say, and then reject the consolation if you can.]

3. For instruction to the more advanced Christian—

[Is a broken and contrite heart the sacrifice with which you must come to God? know that it is that which you must continue also to offer him to the latest hour of your lives. You are not to lose the remembrance of your shame and sorrow, but to "lothe yourselves *after* that God is pacified toward you[z]," yea, and *because* that God is pacified towards you. The more abundant is his mercy towards you, the more should you abhor yourself for having ever sinned against so gracious a God. You cannot

[s] 2 Cor. vii. 10. [t] Jer. xxxi. 18—20. [u] Isai. lxi. 1—3.
[x] Luke iv. 17—21. [y] Matt. xi. 28. [z] Ezek. xvi. 63.

cannot but have seen in others, and probably felt within yourselves, a disposition to depart from this ground, and to indulge a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride. I intreat you to examine yourselves with respect to it — — —It is a common evil, and is very apt to lurk in us unperceived.—But if we see it not ourselves, we shall without fail discover it to others; or, if they should not discover it, God will behold it, and that too with utter abhorrence[a]. Watch over yourselves therefore, and pray that you may grow continually in lowliness of mind, in tenderdess of conscience, in meekness of temper, and in purity of heart. The more you resemble little children, the higher will you be in the kingdom of God[b].]

[a] Prov. xvi. 5. & 1 Pet. v. 5. [b] Matt. xviii. 4.

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## CCCLXXIV.

### DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD.

Ps. lvii. 7—11. *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.*

HERE we behold the bosom of a saint laid open, and the inmost recesses of his heart exposed to view. We cannot read the words without being more or less impressed with this thought, O that my soul were in such a state as his! Indeed the Psalmist himself judged this record of his experience to be of more than ordinary importance to the Church: and therefore, at a subsequent period, he detached these words from the context in which they stand, and made them the commencement of a separate psalm[a]; intimating thereby, that they were not only proper to be used on occasion of any great deliverance, like that which had just been vouchsafed to him in the wilderness of En-gedi, (where Saul had sought to destroy him[b],) but that our frame of mind

[a] Ps. cviii. [b] 1 Sam. xxiv.

mind at all times should be such as was there expressed.

Let us observe,

I. The grounds of his love to God—

From the particular mercy which he had received, he was led to contemplate God's wonderful perfections; and particularly to admire,

1. The extent of his mercy—

[The temporal deliverance itself was a rich display of mercy, because it bespoke the watchful care of God over one, who, as a sinner, might rather have been an object of his displeasure. But David looked beyond the immediate occasion of his gratitude, and viewed the mercy of God towards his soul. David knew himself to be a sinner, and that, if God should enter into judgment with him, he must inevitably and eternally perish. Nor was he ignorant of the means which God had provided for the redemption of his soul. Not even Isaiah himself prophesied more fully, or more minutely, respecting the sufferings and glory of the Messiah, than David did. Hence, viewing himself as a redeemed sinner, bought with the blood of God's only dear Son, he could not but adore the boundless extent of God's mercy towards him: "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens."

This must be the foundation of love in us also. Our blessed Lord has told us, that "they who have much forgiven will love much; but those who have but little forgiven will love little[c]." There is no one so ignorant or obdurate, but that he will acknowledge that God is merciful: but the hopes of the generality are founded, not so much on the extent of God's mercy, as on the smallness of the occasion which they have for the exercise of it: and hence they are never penetrated with any deep sense of it as exercised towards them. But a person duly sensible of the greatness of his sins, will form a corresponding estimate of God's mercies; which will appear to him, "as the heavens, great" and without limit; insomuch, that he will be able to find no terms whereby to express his views of them more justly than those of David in another psalm; "As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy to them that fear him[d]."

Let this be borne in mind, that all our love to God must have its origin in a knowledge of ourselves: since it is only from a view of our own extreme guilt and helplessness that we can appreciate in any degree the patience and forbearance, the mercy and loving-kindness, which, from our earliest infancy to this present hour, he has exercised towards us — — —]

2. The

[c] Luke vii. 47. [d] Ps. ciii. 11.

2. The inviolability of his truth—

[God had promised to David, that in due time he should sit upon the throne of Israel: and the many signal deliverances which he had received, all tended to confirm in his mind an expectation of the promised blessing. And it is remarkable, that Saul himself was struck with those particular occurrences precisely in that view: "Now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand[e]." Hence "the truth" and faithfulness of God appeared to him as no less worthy of admiration than his love and mercy.

And will not every one who has ever laid hold upon the promises of the Gospel, and found them verified in his own experience, fix his mind upon this attribute of the Deity with grateful adoration? Will he not even find in his own soul a more impressive evidence of the truth of God, than in the whole universe besides? The very circumstance of his having been preserved by the power of God amidst so many snares and temptations, whilst so many, who once appeared in a more hopeful state than he, have made shipwreck of their faith, will fill his soul with rapture, and constrain him to say, "The Lord my God changeth not; and therefore it is that I am not consumed[f]." Others may prove by arguments the truth of God, at the same time that they have no admiring or adoring thoughts of it; but *he* will regard himself as a living witness of this glorious perfection; and will both think and speak of it as one who is even lost with wonder in the contemplation of it.]

Such were the grounds of David's love to God. We next proceed to notice,

II. His expression of it—

Full of ardour,

1. He determines to praise and glorify God to the uttermost—

[The determination of his soul he thus declares: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." Here is the result of deep conviction. He knew his obligations to God: and, whether others would concur with him or not, his purpose was unalterable: if no other creature in the universe would praise God, *he* would. He felt it to be his bounden duty: nor should all the sneers of an ungodly world divert him from the performance of it.

But, feeling that his sluggish heart did not obey the call as he could wish, he chides his soul: "Awake up, my glory," my tongue,

[e] 1 Sam. xxiv. 20. [f] Mal. iii. 6.

tongue, by which alone I can ascribe to God the honour due unto his name: "awake, psaltery and harp," with which I am accustomed to celebrate his praise: "I myself," with all my faculties and all my powers, "will awake early," and reproach, as it were, the tardiness of the morning dawn.

Nor would he be content with praising God amidst his own family circle; he would praise him among the whole Jewish "people," yes, and amidst "all the nations" of the world; that so the whole universe, both Jews and Gentiles, might learn to love and honour the God of his salvation.

Now here we see the way in which all our souls should be engaged. Under a deep sense of the goodness of our God, we should feel such a determination of heart as nothing can shake: we should be saying with Joshua, "Though all Israel should depart from God, I and my house will serve the Lord[g]." From time to time we should stir up ourselves to this holy exercise, and labour to bring our minds to a frame suited to the occasion. Nor should we be satisfied with approving ourselves to God in secret: we should honour him in the face of the whole world, and endeavour to prevail with all to unite with us in a duty so urgent, so reasonable, so delightful.]

2. He begs of God also to exalt and glorify himself—

[Sensible that, with all his efforts, he could affect but few, he intreats God to shew forth his own glory, and, by augmented displays of it, to "exalt himself above heaven and earth." Thus to the same effect he addresses Jehovah in another psalm; "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty! with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness; and let thy right hand teach thee terrible things[h]." In the 148th Psalm, his whole employment from beginning to end is to call on all the different creatures in heaven and earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, to unite, according to their respective powers, in glorifying God.

Such then should be our prayer also: the manifestation of God's glory should be so dear to us, that we should have no wish, no thought, no desire in comparison of it.]

ADDRESS—

That you may attain a greater measure of David's piety,

1. Study the Divine character, as illustrated in his dealings with you—

[To mark the dispensations of providence and grace is good:

[g] Josh. xxiv. 15. [h] Ps. xlv. 4.

good: but it will be of little service, unless we mark the perfections of God as displayed in his dealings with us. See, for instance, how multiplied your transgressions against him have been, and how wonderful has been his forbearance in not cutting you off in your sins, and making you monuments of his indignation, like the rebellious Israelites of old, or like Ananias and Sapphira in the Apostolic age! Call to mind how ready he has been at all times to receive you to his favour, and, in answer to your prayers, to send you fresh supplies of grace, or mercy, or peace, according to your necessities. Mark your various backslidings; and contrast with these the richness of his communications to you: and then say, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy[i]." The sense of God's excellency which you obtain from other sources will be speculative, superficial, transient; but that which you derive from his dealings with you will be deep, practical, abiding———]

2. Seek to have the dispositions of your minds suited to his dispensations towards you—

[What are the feelings which his mercy and truth should generate in your soul? Should they not be those of admiration, and love, and gratitude, and affiance? Should they not be also those of holy zeal in his service? Should they not be accompanied with a desire that the whole world should know him? Here then you see precisely what should be the state of your mind from day to day. *This* is piety: *this* is religion. Religion is not a matter of dispute, but of practice; and not of mere morals, but of spiritual feeling, similar to that which is expressed in my text, and venting itself in such language is this: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits[k]." This is your *duty*, shall I say? No: it is your *privilege:* and it is a very antepast of heaven. May God in his mercy diffuse amongst us this spirit more and more, and attune all our hearts to sing without ceasing the praises of our God!]

[i] Mic. vii. 18. [k] Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

## CCCLXXV.

### ADVICE TO THE AFFLICTED.

Ps. lxi. 2. *From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.*

IN whatever situation we be, we shall find both consolation in the promises, and direction in the examples, that are recorded for our use in the Sacred Writings. But in seasons of affliction principally will the holy Oracles be found precious, because they exhibit to us God's dearest children in similar circumstances, and point out to us the means, which they, in their troubles, found effectual for their relief.

In recommending the example of David, we shall,

I. Mention some seasons wherein our hearts are apt to be overwhelmed—

This is a vale of tears to all: but to some more especially,

1. From temporal calamities—

[Bodily pains, loss of friends[a], embarrassed circumstances, will weigh down the spirits even of the best. And though, at times, religion will enable them to triumph in the midst of all their tribulations, yet its more common operation is, to moderate their grief, to produce resignation in their souls, and to sanctify the affliction to their spiritual advancement.]

2. From spiritual troubles—

[The *first convictions* of penitents are often accompanied with the deepest anguish; insomuch that, if God did not support them by a hope of his mercy, they might, like Judas, destroy themselves in utter despair. Their *subsequent views* also *of their in-dwelling corruptions* are frequently attended with such dejection, as quite to enervate the body and overwhelm the soul[b]. If to these be added *the hidings of God's face*, the soul may have a foretaste even of hell itself in the miseries that it endures[c].]

3. From the near prospect of death—

[To a person enjoying the Divine presence, death has no terrors[d]: it is a welcome messenger, that cannot come too soon. But

[a] 2 Sam. xviii. 33. [b] Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. Rom. vii. 24.
[c] Ps. lxxvii. 2—9. N. B. "*overwhelmed.*" [d] Phil. i. 21, 23.

But to one in spiritual darkness and desertion, it is inexpressibly dreadful; and the whole world would appear but a small price to pay for the respite of a few days. The ungodly, it is true, too often die as insensible as the beasts: but the godly, who know the terrors of the Lord, cannot pass through that dreary valley without extreme horror, unless they have an inward witness of their acceptance with God[o].]

The example in the text may serve as a model, while we endeavour to,

II. Shew how we should conduct ourselves in those seasons—

1. To speak *generally*, we should betake ourselves to prayer—

[God is the only source of strength and consolation. If we apply to the creature in our distress, we shall invariably find him but a broken reed[f]. On the contrary, the pressure that is on our minds will, for the most part, increase: or, if the trouble be removed, the removal will prove a heavier judgment than its continuance. But if we apply with humility to a throne of Grace, the desired effect will almost instantly appear[g]. There is no trouble from which prayer has not extricated the sons of men: it prolonged the life of Hezekiah[h]; brought Jonah from the bottom of the sea[i]; and restored to peace the tempest-tossed soul of David[k]. For us also, if it be fervent, it shall effectually prevail[l]: there is no disquietude which it shall not pacify, "no sorrow which it shall not turn into songs of joy[m]." Wherever we are therefore, even "at the very ends of the earth," and however circumstanced, we should make our requests known unto God, in order to the attainment of solid peace[n].]

2. More *particularly*, we should beg of God to lead us to the Saviour—

[David, though a king, had no sufficiency in himself: he was forced to look to one higher than himself, even to Jesus, the Rock of his salvation[nn]. But how should he come to Jesus, unless the Father should draw him[o]? Hence he prayed so fervently, that God would "lead" him to that Rock. Thither then must we also go; for there alone can we find stability. Does guilt appal us? nothing but the blood of Jesus can compose our mind[p]. Do temptations harass us? nothing but his grace can enable us to withstand them[q]. Do accumulated troubles threaten to

[o] Ps. lv. 4, 5. and perhaps Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.
[f] Hos. v. 14. Isai. xxxi. 3. [g] Isai. lxv. 24. [h] 2 Kin. xx. 1—6.
[i] Jonah ii. 1—7. [k] Ps. cxvi. 3—8. [l] Jam. v. 16.
[m] Ps. l. 15. [n] Phil. iv. 6, 7. [nn] Ps. lxxxix. 19.
[o] John vi. 44. [p] Acts xvi. 29—31. [q] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

to overwhelm us? we can both do and suffer all things, if HE strengthen us[r]; yea, we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us[s]. Like a shipwrecked mariner standing on a rock, we may defy the waves that roar beneath our feet. Such was the experience of David himself[t]; and such shall be ours also, if the storms that threaten us drive us for security to that place of safety. Let us then, in every affliction, look to Jesus as our help; and, with a deep impression of our inability to go to him aright, let us cry unto God, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!"]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who experience no overwhelming troubles—

[However serene the sky at present be, no man knows how soon a storm may arise. But supposing our voyage through life be ever so favourable, it must come to an end: and what shall we do in the hour of death without an interest in Christ? Above all, what must become of us, if we be not fixed upon that Rock at the day of judgment? Let us then improve our tranquil hours in securing an establishment on Christ Jesus; that, however suddenly calamities may come, or death may summon us into the presence of our God, we may be found standing immoveably on the Rock of ages. Then, like Noah, shall we rejoice in God's favour, when thoughtless myriads shall be overwhelmed in the deluge of his wrath.]

2. Those who are bowed down under trouble—

[You are but too apt to carry your complaints to men, instead of spreading them before God. What wonder then you find no deliverance? Has not David told you, that this was his very experience; and that nothing but the use of this remedy afforded him relief[u]? Chide then, and resist, your backwardness to prayer. Lay the blame, not on God, who is willing to impart help, but on yourselves, who are unwilling to implore it. Your troubles are sent on purpose to drive you to the Saviour, whom, in a time of prosperity, you are too prone to neglect: and if you suffer them to produce that effect, you shall soon number them among your richest blessings.]

[r] Rom. viii. 37. [s] ib. [t] Ps. xl. 1—3. N.B. "*the rock.*"
[u] Ps. xxxii. 3—5.

## CCCLXXVI.

### GOD OUR ONLY AND ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP.

Ps. lxii. 5—8. *My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the Rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times, ye people; pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.*

THERE is scarcely any thing that more offends the ignorant and ungodly, than a profession of maintaining fellowship with Jehovah, and of receiving from him certain communications which are unknown to the world at large. Such pretensions are considered by them as the offspring of spiritual pride and incurable presumption. But it will scarcely be supposed that the Gospel has reduced us to a lower state than was enjoyed under the law, or deprived us of privileges that were possessed under that less perfect dispensation: yet behold, with what intimate access to God the Psalmist was favoured, and what communion with him he teaches every contrite sinner to expect! It is worthy of observation, that in this psalm there is not one single petition, or thanksgiving: the whole of it is occupied in stating what comfort he found in God, and in encouraging others to expect the same. Especially in the words which we have just read, we see,

I. His happy experience—

Great and manifold were David's trials, from his earliest youth even to his dying hour. But "in all he encouraged himself in the Lord his God:"

He waited upon God as his all-sufficient help—

[The psalm begins with affirming this: and, in our text, he encourages his soul to persevere in this blessed course: "My soul, wait thou only upon God." As for men, he found that they could not be relied upon: both rich and poor were alike but a broken reed, "a lie and vanity[a]." Nor could power or wealth afford any better ground of confidence[b]. God alone has the power requisite for supplying the wants of his creatures[c]; and

[a] ver. 9. [b] ver. 10. [c] ver. 11.

and therefore "from God alone was all his expectation[d]." To him he looked in all his troubles, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. When persecuted by Saul, he fled to his invisible Protector, and took refuge under the shadow of Jehovah's wings ——— In like manner, when assaulted by Satan, his great spiritual adversary, "he gat him to his Lord right humbly," and sought in him that salvation which He alone can give ——— Under all circumstances he considered God as *able*, *willing*, yea and *pledged* too, to deliver him: and to him he ran, as to a strong tower, in which he found unfailing security. As to the time and manner of his deliverance, he left that entirely to God.]

He found in God all that his diversified necessities required—

[He was never disappointed of his hope. The many miraculous escapes which he experienced testify, that God was ever nigh at hand to help him ——— and the peace and stability which he obtained in his soul after his most grievous fall, manifestly prove, how exceedingly the grace of God was magnified towards him ——— We wonder not at his frequent repetition of the same acknowledgments[e], or at the augmented confidence with which he was enabled to look forward to a continuance of the Divine favour even unto death[f].]

But from this experience he was fully qualified to give,

II. His advice founded upon it—

To wait on God is the duty of every living creature, and especially of those who are instructed in the knowledge of his revealed will. "He is the one source of every good and perfect gift." On him therefore David advises us to wait,

1. In a way of earnest prayer—

[We should not merely call upon God, but "pour out our hearts before him." If our troubles be of a more public nature, we should, like Hezekiah, spread our wants before him[g]: or, if they be known to ourselves alone, we should, like Hannah, carry them to the Lord[h]. The direction given us by God himself is, that "*in every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we should make our requests known unto God[i]." We should not say of one thing, It is too great for me to ask; or of another thing, It is too small: we should remember, that "he will be inquired of by us," before he will communicate to us his

[d] ver. 5. [e] ver. 1, 2. with the text.
[f] Compare ver. 2. with ver. 6. "Not greatly moved;" "Not moved at all." [g] 2 Kin. xix. 14. [h] 1 Sam. i. 15.
[i] Phil. iv. 6.

his promised blessings[k]: and, if we ask in faith, he will "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we either ask or think."]

2. In a way of confident expectation—

[We should "not stagger at any of God's promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." If he see fit to delay his answer, we must not be discouraged, but wait his time; assured, that "the vision shall not tarry" beyond the precise moment that he sees to be best for us[l]. We must trust him no less when we see no way for our deliverance[m], than when the promised relief is visibly at hand. Under all the endearing characters which are assigned to him in our text, we should expect his gracious interposition. If our difficulties and trials be of a temporal nature, we should anticipate with confidence his effectual aid[n]; and if of a spiritual nature, we should feel assured, that none shall finally prevail against us[nn]: we should confidently say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who are labouring under temporal affliction—

[Those who have no God to go to, often sink under their troubles, and not unfrequently seek refuge from them in suicide. Be ye not like to them. There is a God, whose is the earth, and the fulness thereof, and who feedeth even the ravens that call upon him. Your trials are intended to lead you to him; and if they have this effect, you shall have cause to bless him for them to all eternity. Only remember not to lean to the creature for support. Seek every thing in God; in "God *only*;" in "God *at all times*;" and you shall not be disappointed of your hope.]

2. To those who are bowed down with spiritual trouble—

[Hear what instruction the prophet Jeremiah gives to persons in your state[o]. David had sunk under his troubles, if he had not cast his care entirely upon the Lord[p]. Follow then his example in this particular: charge it upon yourself to do so; "My soul, wait thou only upon God." And if still distressing fears oppress you, chide your unbelieving soul as he did; "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my confidence and my God[q]."]

[k] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [l] Hab. ii. 3.
[m] Isai. l. 10. Isai. xxviii. 16. [n] Isai. l. 7—9.
[o] Lam. iii. 25, 26. Add to this, ib. ver. 27, 28, 29.
[p] Ps. xxvii. 13, 14. [q] Ps. xlii. 11.

## CCCLXXVII.

### THE BELIEVER'S DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS GOD.

Ps. lxiii. 1—7. *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

IT is justly said of God, that "he giveth songs in the night:" and never was there a more striking evidence of it than in the psalm before us. David is supposed to have written it when he was in the wilderness of Ziph, fleeing from Saul who was seeking to destroy him[a]. But we can scarcely conceive that he would call himself "the king," as he does in the 11th verse, in the life-time of Saul: for though he believed that God would ultimately raise him to the throne, it would have been treason against his legitimate prince to arrogate to himself the title of "king;" nor can we conceive that under his perilous circumstances he would have given Saul so just a ground of accusation against him. For these reasons we are inclined to think it was written at the time that he fled into the wilderness from Absalom, when he, and the people that were with him, were in the greatest distress for every necessary of life[b]. But what are the contents of this psalm? Nothing but joy and triumph: the things of time and sense were as nothing in his eyes; but God was "all in all."

From that portion of the psalm which we have read, we shall take occasion to shew you the *desires*, the *purposes*, and the *expectations* of a renewed soul.

I. The desires—

As soon as the soul has obtained an interest in Christ,

[a] 1 Sam. xxiii. 15. [b] 2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29.

Christ, and reconciliation with God through him, it is privileged to claim God as its own peculiar portion: it is entitled to say of Christ, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his:" "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*." And to the Father himself also, as now reconciled to him, he can say, "O God, thou art MY God." It is no wonder then, that from henceforth God becomes the one object of his desire.

The soul now finds no satisfaction in earthly things—

[This whole world appears to it as "a land where no water is." The whole creation seems to be but "a broken cistern," which, whilst it promises refreshment to the weary and heavy-laden, is never able to impart it.

If it be objected, that, though David under his peculiar trials found the world so barren of all good, we may find it a source of comfort to us; we answer, That there is nothing in this world that is suited to satisfy the desires of an immortal soul; and that, the more we have of this world, the more fully shall we be convinced, that it is altogether an empty bubble, a cheat, a lie; and that "vanity and vexation of spirit" is written by the finger of God himself upon all that it contains. The carnal mind cannot credit this: but the renewed soul needs no argument to convince it of this truth.]

Its desire therefore is after God alone—

["Early will I seek thee," is the language of every one that is born of God. In the secret chamber his first waking thoughts will be, "Where is God my Maker?" where is Jesus my Redeemer? where is the blessed Spirit my Sanctifier and my Comforter? In the public ordinances also especially will his soul desire communion with its God. It has beheld somewhat of God's power and glory in the manifestations of his love, and in the communications of his grace; and it bears those seasons in remembrance, and longs to have them renewed from time to time. The bare ordinances will not satisfy the Believer, if God be not in them: it is not to perform a duty that he comes up to the sanctuary, but to meet his God, and enjoy sweet converse with him: and if he meet not God there, he is like a man who, with much ardent expectation, has gone to a distant city to meet his friend, and has been disappointed of his hope: or rather he is like those of whom the prophet Jeremiah speaks, who in a season of extreme drought "came to the pits and found no water; and returning with their vessels empty, were ashamed, and confounded, and covered their heads[c]." They know by sad experience

[c] Jer. xiv. 3.

rience that "there is no water" elsewhere; and if they find not access to "God, the living fountain," their very "flesh" sympathizes with their "souls," and fainteth by reason of the painful disappointment. This is beautifully described in another psalm[d]: and it is realized in the experience of every Believer, in proportion to the integrity of his soul before God, and to the measure of grace with which he is endued———]

In perfect correspondence with the desires of a renewed soul, are,

II. Its purposes—

The Believer determines to praise and glorify his God—

[The language of his heart is, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." He knows what God hath said, "Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me:" and he determines to offer unto God the tribute that is so justly due. Nor will he do this in a cold and formal manner: no; as a man of warm feelings expresses with his body the emotions of his soul, so will he, together with his heart, lift up his hands also in the name of his God. Nor will he pour forth these effusions only on some particular occasions, or during any one particular season: he will do it continually; he will do it to the latest hour of his life. He considers "praise as comely for the upright;" and he wishes it to be the constant language of his lips.]

To this determination he is led by the consideration of the loving-kindness of his God—

[O how wonderful does that love appear to him, which gave no less a person than God's co-equal co-eternal Son to die for him! which gave him too the knowledge of that Saviour, together with all spiritual and eternal blessings in him, whilst thousands and millions of the human race are dying in ignorance and perishing in their sins! This loving-kindness so free, so rich, so full, appears to him "better than even life itself;" and all that he can do to testify his gratitude seems nothing, yea "less than nothing," in comparison of it. The language of his heart is, "If I should hold my peace, the very stones would cry out against me." O that I had powers equal to the occasion! how would I praise him! how would I glorify him! verily I would praise him on earth, even as they do in heaven.]

In these purposes the believing soul is yet further confirmed by,

III. Its

[d] Ps. xlii. 1—3.

III. Its expectations—

The service of God is not without its reward even in this life: and hence the Believer, whilst engaged in his favourite employment, expects,

1. The richest consolation—

[The carnal mind can see no pleasure in this holy exercise; but the spiritual mind is refreshed by it, more than the most luxurious epicure ever was by the richest dainties. His very meditations are unspeakably sweet: yea, while contemplating his God upon his bed, and during the silent watches of the night, "his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness:" it has a foretaste even of heaven itself——— From its own experience of this heavenly joy, the soul expects this glorious harvest, when it has sown in tears, and laboured to glorify its God in songs of praise.]

2. The most assured safety—

[Thus engaged, the soul looks down upon all its enemies with disdain: it feels itself in an impregnable fortress: it is conscious that it owes all its past preservation to the help of its Almighty Friend; and it rejoices in the thought that under the shadow of the Redeemer's wings it must still be safe; and that "none shall ever pluck it out of the Father's hands." The state of Hezekiah, when surrounded by a vast army that was bent on his destruction, exactly shews what is the state of a believing soul in the midst of all its enemies: "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." Such was the language of Zion to all the Assyrian hosts: and such is the blessed anticipation of victory which every Believer is privileged to enjoy[e].]

IMPROVEMENT:

1. How greatly do the generality of religious professors live below their privileges!

[It was not peculiar to David thus to delight in God: it was then common, and is yet common, to all the saints. Can it be thought that we, who live under so much better a dispensation than he, and have so much brighter discoveries of God's power and glory than ever he had, should yet not be privileged to delight in God as he did? Were this the case, we should be losers by that religion which the Son of God came down from heaven to establish. But it is not so: we may partake of all spiritual blessings in as rich abundance as he, or any other of the saints of old, did. And we have reason to be ashamed that our

[e] Rom. viii. 33—39.

our desires after God are so faint, our purposes respecting him so weak, and our expectations from him so contracted. Let us, each for himself, look at our experience from day to day, and compare it with his; and let us not rest, till we have attained somewhat at least of that delight in God, which so eminently distinguished that blessed man.]

2. What encouragement have all to seek after God!

[It was not only after David had so grievously trangressed, but at the very moment when God was chastening him for his transgressions, that he was thus favoured of his God[f]. Can we then with propriety say, This mercy is not for *me?* it is not possible for such a sinner as I ever to be thus highly favoured? Know ye, that there is no limit, either to the sovereign exercise of God's grace, or to its influence on the souls of men. His grace often most abounds, where sin has most abounded: and the vilest of us all may yet become the richest monument of God's love and mercy, if only, like David, he will humble himself for his iniquities, and sprinkle on his conscience the blood of our great sacrifice. O beloved! know, if you come to God by Christ, you shall never be cast out; and if you commit yourself in faith entirely to Christ, you shall rejoice in him with joy unspeakable, and receive in due time the great end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.]

[f] Absalom's incestuous commerce with David's wives was foretold by Nathan, as a part of David's punishment for his sin in taking to him the wife of his friend Uriah.

## CCCLXXVIII.

### STABILITY THE GIFT OF GOD.

Ps. lxvi. 8,9, *O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.*

THE blessings of Providence, when uninterruptedly continued, are scarcely noticed: it is only when the loss of them has been painfully apprehended, or actually sustained, that we consider how much we were indebted to God for them. What were the particular trials that had been endured by David or the Jewish nation, we cannot precisely determine: but it is evident, that the deliverance vouchsafed to them had made a lively impression on the

the Psalmist's mind[a]. The words of our text would furnish exceedingly profitable meditations, if we confined them to their primary import; since the preservation of our life and health, amidst the many seen and unseen dangers with which we are surrounded, demands our most grateful acknowledgments. But a subsequent part of the psalm shews clearly that the writer had respect also to spiritual blessings[b]; and therefore we shall draw your attention more especially to them; and shew,

I. What a mercy it is to be upheld in the ways of God—

We feel somewhat of the obligation conferred upon us in our first awakening and conversion; but are by no means duly sensible how much we owe to our God for our daily preservation. But we shall learn better to appreciate this mercy if we consider,

1. To how many snares and dangers we are exposed!

[We have frequent occasion to advert to the temptations with which we are encompassed in the world; and to notice the still greater dangers we experience from the corruptions of our own hearts; and the additional conflicts which we have to sustain with all the powers of darkness. We dwell not therefore so particularly on those things at this time; but rather mention the danger to which we are exposed even from lawful things. It is not only allowable, but highly proper, to prosecute our worldly callings with diligence; and to cultivate the tenderest regard for our wife or children: yet both the one and the other may engross too much of our hearts, and become hindrances to us in our journey towards heaven. Our food, our sleep, our studies, our recreations, may become snares, if we be not continually on our guard. It is therefore an unspeakable mercy to be upheld in the midst of such manifold temptations.]

2. How many, in like circumstances with ourselves, have fallen—

[We are living in the full enjoyment of divine ordinances, and of whatever can conduce to the welfare of our souls. But are we therefore secure? Look back to the Apostolic age: see how many then were seduced by error[c]—or disheartened by the fear

[a] Compare ver. 1, 2. with ver. 10—12.
[b] ver. 16. [c] Tit. i. 11. 2 Tim. ii. 18.

fear of man[d]—or turned aside by the love of this world[e]—or overthrown by unbridled passions[f]. What reason than have we to adore the grace that has preserved *us!*]

3. What would be the probable consequence of our falling—

[Some who have fallen have been restored speedily[g]; and some after a lapse of time[h]: but thousands have fallen to rise no more. The progress of declension is for the most part rapid. The heart becomes averse to holy duties: from secret neglects proceeds a backwardness to social conference and public ordinances. The conscience is gradually weakened, till it ceases to perform its office, or speaks in so faint a voice, that it is scarcely heard. The besetting sin then gains an entire ascendant, and leads him captive; till at last, God, filled with indignation against the base apostate, "gives him up to a reprobate mind[i]," and either cuts him off by a sudden stroke[j], or leaves him to protract a miserable existence, merely that he may bear testimony against his own impieties, and proclaim to those around him the foretastes which he already feels of his eternal destiny[k].

Such examples we have seen[l]: what a mercy it is that we ourselves, instead of being warned by others, are not made a warning to others!]

4. What occasion we have given to God to let us fall—

[Let us call to mind our own backslidings; our secret neglects; our tampering with temptations; our indulgence of evil passions; our vain-confident presumption: is it not wonderful that God has not long since said respecting us, "Let him alone[m];" "My Spirit shall strive with him no longer[n]:" "He likes not to retain God in his knowledge; so I will give him up[o]?"]

If we be convinced of these things, let us proceed to consider,

II. The duty of those who experience this mercy—

There can be no doubt on this subject. If our souls have been upheld in life, we should,

1. Acknow-

[d] 2 Tim. i. 15. & iv. 16. Matt. xxvi. 73, 74.
[e] Matt. xiii. 22. 2 Tim. iv. 10. [f] 1 Tim. v. 11, 12. 2 Sam. xi. 4.
[g] John xxi. 15—17. [h] 2 Sam. xii. 13.
[i] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. [j] Prov. xxix. i. Acts v. 5, 10.
[k] Eccl. v. 17. with Prov. xiv. 32.
[l] This was preached on occasion of a person that had made a profession of religion, going back to drunkenness, and dying in a drunken fit. See other examples, 1 Cor. x. 6—11.
[m] Hos. iv. 17. [n] Gen. vi. 3. [o] Rom. i. 28.

1. Acknowledge God in our stedfastness—

[" Who is it that has made us to differ" from others[p]? Have we by nature any more strength than they? or have we of ourselves a more abundant measure of goodness? No: it is " by the grace of God we are what we are[q]: we have been as much indebted to his protecting hand, as a new-born infant is to its mother's care. We should then acknowledge, that " of him our fruit is found[r];" that " it is he who hath wrought us to the self-same thing[s];" and that to him belongs all the glory of our stability[t].]

2. Bless and adore him for his great goodness—

[It is not by cold acknowledgments merely that we are to requite the Lord, but by fervent and devout thanksgivings. It is not possible for language adequately to express the obligations we owe to him: and therefore we should call upon " all that is within us to bless his holy name."

Nor should we be content with doing this ourselves: we should invite the whole creation, as it were, to join us. We should labour to stimulate all to love and serve him; and to make his name known to the very ends of the earth[u].

It is in this way that we should endeavour at least, as much as in us lies, to " render unto the Lord according to the benefits" he has conferred upon us.]

3. Walk humbly and carefully before him—

[We must not presume upon the kindness of our God, or imagine, that, because we have been upheld hitherto, we are in no danger of falling: if we had attained the stability of St. Paul himself, " we must keep our body under, and bring it into subjection, lest we become cast-aways ourselves[x]." To neglect this, were to tempt God. God has warned us plainly, that " he will be with us no longer than we continue with him; that if we forsake him, he will forsake us[y]." We therefore must not be high-minded, but fear[z]; and take heed lest we fall[a]; and " watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation[b]." If we would have our God to keep us, we must be careful to " keep ourselves[c]." We must look at the fearful examples that are before our eyes[cc], and tremble lest we ourselves become similar monuments of instability, and of God's deserved wrath.]

4. Commit ourselves continually to him—

[God has engaged to " keep the feet of his saints[d];" and directed

[p] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [q] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [r] Hos. xiv. 8. Isai. xxvi. 12.
[s] 2 Cor. v. 5. [t] Ps. lxii. 8. & xxvi. 12.
[u] Isai. xii. 4—6. or xlii. 10—12. See also *the text.*
[x] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [y] 2 Chron. xv. 2. [z] 1 Cor. x. 12.
[a] Rom. xi. 20. [b] Matt. xxvi. 41. [c] ver. 18. with Jude 20, 21.
[cc] Luke xvii. 32. Heb. iv. 11. [d] 1 Sam. ii. 9.

directed us to commit ourselves to him for that purpose[e]; and assured us, that, if we do so, "he will establish our goings[f]." We should commend ourselves therefore to his gracious care and protection. We should say with David, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not[g]:" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe[h]." To this we are encouraged by our past experience of his mercy: we may from the kindness already shewn us, safely infer the continuance of it to our souls[i]. If we can say, "He hath delivered," we may properly add, "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[k]."]

But here arise two important QUESTIONS, which it is of the utmost importance to resolve:

1. Are our souls really alive to God?

[In vain shall we speak of having "our souls upheld in life," if they have never yet been quickened from the dead. Let us then seriously, and as in the presence of God, inquire, Whether we have been made partakers of a new and living principle, whereby we have been enabled to die unto sin, and to live unto God? Let us not mistake a mere approbation of religion for real regeneration: we must have become new creatures, having new views, new desires, new pursuits, and new prospects, if we have been truly born again[l]: and if this change have not been wrought within us, we are yet in our natural and unconverted state; we may have "a name to live, but are really dead" before God: notwithstanding we may have been preserved from any flagrant violation of our duty, we are yet "dead in trespasses and sins."]

2. Supposing that we are on the whole alive to God, have "our feet really been kept from falling?"

[We must ascertain this fact, before we can cordially thank God for it. And is it indeed true of all who profess religion amongst us, that they have been kept? Have none of us acted unworthy of our high calling? Has there been nothing in our tempers, nothing in our worldly transactions, inconsistent with our profession? Or, supposing our outward conduct to have been unimpeachable, have there been no secret sins, which we have reason to mourn over; nothing for which we ought to blush and be confounded before God? Perhaps, if we look inward, we shall find more occasion to bewail our falls, than to bless our God for having kept us from falling.

But, if conscience testify that we have indeed walked uprightly before God, then let us imitate the example in the text, and not only bless and magnify him ourselves, but endeavour also to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" throughout the world.]

[e] 1 Pet. iv. 19. [f] 2 Chron. xx. 20. [g] Ps. xvii. 5. [h] Ps. cxix. 117.
[i] Ps. lvi. 13. [k] 2 Cor. i. 10. [l] 2 Cor. v. 17.

## CCCLXXIX.

### ANSWERS TO PRAYER ACKNOWLEDGED.

Ps. lxvi. 16. *Come and hear, all ye that fear God! and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.*

ANY person of benevolence who should have discovered an antidote, or remedy, to a very fatal disorder, would feel happy in communicating information respecting it, wherever such knowledge was required[a]. If indeed great gain would accrue to him by concealment, we must concede to him the right of procuring to himself the advantages to which his superior knowledge has entitled him: but where the very act of communicating information will enrich, rather than impoverish, the instructor, and he himself will be made a gainer by imparting, he would be highly criminal if he withheld from the world the blessings he was enabled to confer. This is invariably the case in things pertaining to the soul: and hence we may expect to find all who have been taught of God, ready and willing to impart to others the benefits they have received. The early apostles, Andrew and Philip, no sooner found the Messiah, than they sought to bring their brethren, Peter and Nathaniel, to an acquaintance with him[b]. And the Samaritan woman was no sooner convinced herself of the Messiahship of Jesus, than she went to invite all the men of her city to come and see the person, whom she believed to be the Christ[c]. Thus it was with David: he communed much with God: he learned much from God: he was favoured with the richest communications which God himself could bestow. But he would not keep these things to himself: he hoped, by a free communication with pious characters, to bring them to a participation of all that he himself enjoyed: and therefore, filled with divine philanthropy, he sent out, as it were, this general invitation, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

In

[a] This has been done in reference to *vaccination*.
[b] John i. 40, 45. [c] John iv. 28, 29.

In discoursing on these words, we will shew,

I. What God had done for his soul—

David, as we are told in the foregoing context, had been involved in many troubles, from which nothing but a Divine interposition could have delivered him[d]. But we must not confine the subject to *temporal* deliverances: he speaks of something which God had done for "his *soul*;" and more particularly specifies, that God "had not turned away his *mercy* from him[e];" and makes *that* the peculiar ground of his praise and thanksgiving. We observe then that God had vouchsafed to him,

1. The pardon of his sins—

[This would have been an exceedingly rich mercy, even if David have never fallen from his former integrity. But, if we view the great enormities committed by him in the matter of Uriah, we see good reason why *he* should magnify God's mercy beyond any other of the sons of men. Whether this psalm was written prior, or subsequent to his fall, we know not; and therefore we forbear to notice *that* as an aggravation of his guilt, or as enhancing the mercy vouchsafed to him. As a man, he was a sinner from his mother's womb: and the most perfect of men could no more stand, than the vilest, if God should enter into judgment with him, and mark in him all that had been done amiss. David was sensible of this, and acknowledged it in these expressive terms; "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify thy name for evermore: for great is thy mercy towards me; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell[f]." Let *us* be sensible, how much we also stand in need of mercy; and let us seek it as that without which our souls must for ever perish: or, if we have received mercy, let us devoutly glorify our God for it as a benefit which no words can ever adequately express.]

2. A manifestation of that pardon to his soul—

[David had prayed earnestly to God, and had obtained an answer to his prayer. How this answer was conveyed to his mind, we are not informed: but he had no doubt in his own soul respecting it: he could say, "Verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer[g]." Oh! who can estimate aright *this* mercy? See how the prophet Jeremiah speaks of it: "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing,

[d] ver. 10—12. [e] ver. 20.
[f] Ps. lxxxvi. 12, 13. [g] ver. 19.

breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not[h]." How tender! how pathetic! how encouraging this acknowledgment! Such was David's also, on another occasion: "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles[i]." Truly this is a great and blessed work which "the Lord does for the souls" of men: and it was with good reason that David said, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."]

But it will be proper to state more particularly,

II. Why he was so ready to speak of it—

It was not from ostentation or vanity that he thus called the attention of others to his own concerns, but,

1. From a sense of gratitude to God—

[Such mercies call for the liveliest gratitude, and demand a tribute of praise from the whole world. Hence the soul that feels its obligations for them, would be glad to interest the whole creation in the blessed work of praise and thanksgiving. *This* David attempts in many of his psalms: "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together[k]!"———Had any reflection been cast on him for these devout acknowledgments, he would have replied, as on another occasion, "Is there not a cause[l]?" or rather would have welcomed the disgrace, and said, "I will yet be more vile than thus[m]."]

2. From a sense of love to his fellow-creatures—

[Nothing is more gratifying to the saints than to see or hear what God has done for others. To them therefore David addresses himself. He speaks not to the ungodly; for that would be to "cast his pearls before swine:" but to the godly he knew that the recital of his experience would be a rich source of comfort and encouragement. In another place he explicitly avows this very intention; and, for the promotion of that end, he gives a summary of the Lord's dealings with him during his long impenitence, and on the very first symptoms of penitence and contrition[n]. It is with a similar view that Paul also records his own wickedness in persecuting the Church of Christ; and displays the enormous unparalleled exercise of God's mercy towards

[h] Lam. iii. 55—57. [i] Ps. xxxiv. 4, 6.
[k] Ps. xxxiv. 1—3. & xcvi. 1—4.
[l] 1 Sam. xvii. 29. [m] 1 Sam. vi. 22. [n] Ps. xxxii. 3—6.

wards him, "the chief of sinners:" he declares, that this whole dispensation towards him was designed by God himself as a pattern for the encouragement of all penitents to the end of time [o]. We then, if we "fear God," are the persons invited to come and listen to the voice of David. In all that he has spoken on this subject, he has sought our good: for it was not to him as a prophet that this mercy was vouchsafed, but as a saint, who feared God and wrought righteousness: and every one who in this respect resembles him, may hope to participate with him in his exalted privileges [p].]

As saints indeed we profess to have already enjoyed them in some measure: and therefore we are concerned to inquire,

III. How we may know whether our souls be partakers of the same benefit—.

It is the privilege of all to have access to God, and to have their prayers answered by him: yea, and to know also that they have been answered. Of this we are assured on the authority of God himself———But here the question arises, How shall these answers be clearly known to have come from God? Formerly God was pleased to make known to his people their interest in his favour by means which we are no longer to expect. He *may* indeed, if he see fit, still reveal his will to men by dreams and visions, by voices and signs; but we have no reason to think he either does, or will do so; and therefore we can place no confidence in any manifestations which are professedly derived from such sources. We may also say, that nothing certain can be known from any direct impressions of the Spirit of God upon the mind. We are far from affirming that no such impressions are ever made: for there can be no doubt but that God "sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his people," and gives them "a spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father," and "by his Spirit witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God," and even "seals them by

[o] 1 Tim. i. 13—16.

[p] Compare Ps. lxv. 2. & Isai. lxv. 24. & John xiv. 13, 14. with 1 John v. 13—15.

by the Holy Spirit of promise unto the day of redemption." But still, great and glorious as these operations of the Spirit are, they are not sufficient *of themselves* to prove that God has shewn mercy to our souls: they must have the concurring evidence of good works resulting from them: the feelings themselves may be so closely imitated by Satan, that it shall be impossible for man certainly to distinguish between them: a person of a warm imagination and a confident mind may easily be wrought upon by that subtle spirit, so that he shall appear both to himself and others to be eminently distinguished by manifestations from God, whilst yet he is only under the influence of a Satanic delusion. The evidences whereby alone the work of God upon the soul can be satisfactorily ascertained are,

1. The exercise of gracious affections—

[Love, joy, peace, with all the train of Christian virtues, are the fruits of God's Spirit alone. They cannot for any length of time be counterfeited: not even Satan himself can produce them. Hence we are told, by our blessed Lord, to look to them as the only certain marks and evidences whereby his people can be distinguished: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Would you then know for certain whether God has had mercy on your souls, and whether the supposed manifestations of God's love to your souls are genuine, see how the dispensation operates on your hearts and lives. If it lead you to a sense of lively gratitude to God, if it fill you with a determination to serve and glorify him with all your powers, if it encourage you to commit your every concern to his all-wise disposal, and if it stimulate you to seek by all possible means the welfare of your fellow-creatures, you may confidently say, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God."]

2. The mortification of all sin—

[David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me[q]." To fancy therefore that we have received answers to prayer, whilst there is any sinful temper or disposition harboured in the heart, is a fatal delusion. Even the ungodly Jews, who set themselves in opposition to Christ, were fully convinced of this truth: for, imagining him to be a sinner, and taking occasion from thence to deny the miracle he had wrought, they said, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any

[q] ver. 18.

any man be a worshipper of God and do his will, him he heareth[r]." This then must be a point of diligent inquiry; Is sin in general dispossessed of its power over me? is my besetting sin in particular subdued and mortified? is my hatred to sin inveterate, uniform, unreserved? Unless this be our state, it is in vain that we pretend to communion with the Deity, and boast of our assured acceptance with him: if we are under the habitual influence of any one reigning lust, of whatever kind it be, we may make a great profession of religion, but we are hypocrites; we may make a noise about it, but "we are as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals."]

In reference to this subject, we beg leave to offer some ADVICE—

1. Be careful to notice the dealings of God with your souls—

[Many set themselves against all kinds of Christian experience, and make even the very word, *experience*, a subject of continual ridicule and invective. That injudicious persons have given but too just ground of offence by their statements of their own feelings, must be confessed: but we must not therefore suppose that religion has nothing to do with the feelings, and that it is a matter purely intellectual. Why should that alone have no influence on the heart, when it is calculated more than any thing else to call into activity all the powers of our souls? or why should *that* be enthusiasm in religion, which is deemed reasonable in all the common affairs of life? Let a man be embarked in any thing that greatly involves his honour and interest throughout his life; a merchant in trade; a commander in war; a student in academic contests: will he feel no anxieties? will he have no fluctuations of mind, no alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, according as his prospects brighten or are obscured? will the issue of his labours be to him such a matter of indifference, that he shall contemplate the probabilities of success or failure without any emotion? And if these diversified feelings are so called forth by things which pertain to this life, shall they have no scope for exercise in the things which relate to eternity? Call them by the name of Christian experience, or by any other name, they must have place in our souls; and if they have not, we are altogether dead in trespasses and sins. Let every one then take notice how he is affected with his everlasting concerns: for *he* can never have obtained mercy, who has not sought for mercy; nor *he* received an answer to prayer, who never cried from his inmost soul to God. I must even go farther, and say, *he* has no hope, who never had a fear; nor shall *he* ever taste of joy, who has never been bowed down with penitential sorrow. As we deal with God, he will deal with us: "If we seek him,

[r] John ix. 31.

him, he will be found of us; but if we forsake him, he will forsake us."]

2. Learn to estimate them by a right standard—

[If we judge of our emotions by their intenseness, or by the degree of elevation or depression produced by them, we shall deceive our own souls. The votaries of false religions are sometimes transported beyond the bounds of reason, and are agitated even to madness. A mistaken course of religion too will often operate very strongly on the mind, and leave us, after all, in a state of spiritual death. True religion is sober, discreet, practical: it consists in, or rather is inseparably connected with, "a spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind." It directs to heaven; but does not lead us to neglect our earthly duties. It must be judged of by its practical effects. The grace that leaves us under the defilement of any "spiritual or fleshly filthiness," is no grace. That alone comes from God, which leads to God; and that alone will have any saving efficacy, which assimilates us to "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness."]

3. Endeavour to improve them for the good of others—

[We are not proprietors of our talents, but stewards, to whom they are entrusted for the good of others. We must indeed be much on our guard against conceit, and talkativeness, and a readiness to draw attention to ourselves, and to make *self* the topic of our conversation. A person of this complexion is a very hateful and disgusting character: and too many such, it must be confessed, there are in the religious world. But whilst we avoid such a spirit as this, we must delight to communicate to others the blessings we have received, and to encourage from our own experience a diligent and patient waiting upon God. It is obvious, that if we can say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled of the word of life, that same declare I unto you," our words will come with tenfold weight. We repeat however, that a general communicating of our experiences in large companies is in our judgment highly inexpedient: it is a fruitful source of pride, discouragement, and hypocrisy. But in the confidence of friendship we may unbosom ourselves one to another, and declare, to the abundant edification both of ourselves and others, what God has done for our souls. In seasons of temptation and spiritual trouble, we may by such a communication administer unspeakable comfort to an afflicted brother. Nor is it necessary that we advert particularly to ourselves: if we give the result of our experience, the effect will be the same. The light we have received should not be hid under a bushel: if we have "freely received, we should freely give."]

[s] 2 Cor. i. 6.

## CCCLXXX.

### THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES PRAYED FOR.

Ps. lxvii. 1—7. *God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us: that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us: God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.*

HOW much importance the Compilers of our Liturgy attached to this psalm may be judged from the appointment of it to be read in the daily services of our Church. The general import of the psalm is plain enough: but, in order to get a just view of the different expressions contained in it, we must place ourselves in the situation of David at the time he composed it. The Jewish Church and nation were a peculiar people, instructed in the knowledge of salvation, and living under the government of Jehovah. The righteous among them enjoyed the light of God's countenance, and looked forward to the possession of yet richer blessings under the reign of their Messiah. But the Gentile world were altogether ignorant of a Saviour, and living without God in the world, under the tyranny of the prince of darkness, by whom they were led captive at his will. These two things then the Psalmist desired, namely, The Advent of the Messiah to his own nation, and the Manifestation of him to all the world. The former of these events was prayed for in the beginning of the psalm; "God, be merciful unto us, and bless us" with the accomplishment of that promise, to which all thy people are looking forward, the Advent of the Messiah: and "cause thy face to shine upon us," in the person of Him, who is "the brightness of thy glory, and the express image of thy person!" The latter event however

however seems on this occasion to have chiefly occupied his mind: and the immediate exhibition of Christ to the Jews was desired in order to his ulterior Manifestation to the Gentile world, whom he longed to see partakers of all the privileges which he either enjoyed, or hoped for. He longed to see them brought into "the way" of truth and "salvation," and subjected to the "righteous government" of the Messiah, and growing up before God in multitudes, "like the piles of grass upon the earth[a]."

This being the general subject of the psalm, we shall proceed to notice some important instruction that is to be gathered from it. It shews us,

I. That there are rich blessings yet in store for the Gentiles—

[The whole psalm might with great propriety be read in the future tense, as a prophecy. In the two concluding verses of the psalm it is so read in our translation: and it might have been so read throughout. And in that view how singularly striking is it! how strong and numerous the assertions, that such an event shall take place! At present indeed there seems to be but little prospect of so glorious an event: but we are well assured, it shall come, and *that* too at no distant period. Indeed in part it is already come: for who are we but Gentiles? By the preaching of the Apostles, myriads were converted to the faith of Christ: and myriads are yet monuments of his power and grace. But this is only the first-fruits: we expect a harvest, when "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." We believe that the day is coming when "all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord their God:" "they shall fear the Lord their God, and David their king[b]." "The way" of salvation through a crucified Redeemer "shall then be known among them, and "the saving health" of the Gospel be then imparted to those who are now dying in their sins. The bond-slaves of sin and Satan shall then cast off the yoke of their oppressor, and yield themselves willing subjects to the Prince of peace. In a word, they who have hitherto known no pleasure but in the indulgence of their lusts, shall "be glad in the Lord, and sing praise to his name," and "rejoice in him" as their God for ever and ever. Glorious period! May God hasten it in his time!"]

It

[a] ver. 6. with Ps. lxxii. 16. Compare Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. & lv. 12, 13.
[b] Hos. iii. 5.

It further shews us,

II. What an union there is between piety and philanthropy—

[The Jews were represented by their enemies as haters of mankind. But this was in no respect applicable to the godly among them. What could exceed the love of David towards the Gentile world? We cannot conceive greater earnestness than is expressed for their welfare in this psalm. David seems scarcely to think that he himself is blessed, whilst the Gentile world remain destitute of any share in his blessings. This philanthropy was the fruit of his piety: and wherever true piety exists, it will shew itself in a concern for those who are afar off from God, and perishing in their sins. All piety that is devoid of charity, is a mere name, a phantom, a delusion. "If, says an inspired Apostle, we see our brother have need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in us?" And if this be true in relation to his temporal wants, how much more is it respecting the wants of his soul! We wish all then to judge of their piety by this touchstone: see what measure of compassion you have to your perishing fellow-creatures: see what pleasure you have in contemplating the future accession of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ; what efforts you make to promote it; and what earnestness you have when praying for it at a throne of grace. These things will lead you into a considerable degree of self-knowledge: for be assured you know but little of the saving efficacy of Christ's blood, or the sanctifying efficacy of his grace, if you are not longing and labouring to bring others to a participation of your blessings.]

We may yet further learn,

III. What encouragement we have for Missionary exertions—

[If nothing had been spoken in the Scriptures respecting the conversion of the heathen, we might well sit down in despair and say, It is in vain to attempt so hopeless a work. But when we look into the Scriptures and see how continually this subject is brought forward, and with what confidence it is declared, we should make no account of difficulties, since "with God all things are possible." Ezekiel might have objected to the commission given him to preach to dry bones: but he knew that dry bones could live, if God should be pleased to breathe life into them[c]. Thus may we engage in missionary labours, assured that God will fulfil his own word, and crown our endeavours with success. Indeed the time for the full accomplishment of his promise seems fast approaching; and "the fields appear already, as it were, white unto the harvest." Methinks the

[c] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

the heathen in divers countries are saying to us, not by their necessities only, but by their express desires, "Come over to us, and help us!" And shall we be backward to impart the knowledge with which we are so highly favoured, and the salvation which we profess to glory in? It is obvious enough, that they cannot learn unless they be taught, "nor can they hear, without a preacher." Let not difficulties then dismay us: but let us go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and look to him to accompany our word with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: then may we hope that Satan's empire shall be destroyed, and that the promised kingdom of our Redeemer shall be established on its ruins.]

## CCCLXXXI.

### THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

Ps. lxviii. 35. *The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power to his people: blessed be God!*

THE consideration of God's power is to his enemies awful in the extreme; but to his friends it affords the richest consolation. The immediate subject of the psalm before us is the carrying up of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion: but the power of God in destroying his enemies, and saving his friends, is celebrated throughout in terms of exultation and triumph. In the words of our text this interesting topic is summed up in few words, and concluded with an expression of adoration, well suited to the subject.

We propose to consider,

I. The description here given of God—

Though at first sight this description of the Divine character does not appear very peculiar, yet, if it be attentively considered, it will be found,

1. Most glorious—

[It imports, in the first place, that *God does give strength and power to his people:* and this is proved by all the sacred annals; yea, by daily experience. He has enabled his people of old to resist the greatest temptations[a], to perform the hardest duties,

[a] Gen. xxxix. 10—12.

duties[b]; to endure the heaviest afflictions[c], to triumph over the united assaults of earth and hell[d]. And many can say at this day, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts[e]."

It intimates yet further, that *none but God can give strength to his people.* The mode of expression in the text strongly intimates this. What could the gods of the heathen do for their votaries? God tells them that their senseless idols could not so much as move: they must themselves be carried[f]. And as for human confidences, they were also vain: neither the Assyrian, nor Egyptian, nor any other power, could deliver those who trusted in them[g]. It was the prerogative of Jehovah alone to afford his people the succours they stood in need of[h].

But the full meaning of the text seems to be, that *God delights in supplying his people's wants;* it is that very character in which he most glories, and by which he most wishes to be known. He is always looking out for opportunities of exercising his power on behalf of his people[i]; and rejoices in every occasion that their necessities afford him of making known to them his power and grace[k].]

2. Most endearing—

[If a person be advancing with a full tide of spiritual prosperity, how can he fail of loving the great Author of all his happiness? Surely every exercise of divine power that he has ever experienced, must render this attribute of the Deity precious to his soul, while he beholds the dangers he has escaped, and the difficulties he has overcome.

To a person weak and drooping, this view of the Deity must be still more delightful. How must he check his unbelieving fears; and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God[l]!"

Above all, must this description of God be precious to the poor. They are incapable of entering into abstract views of the Divine perfections: but this representation of the Deity they are as capable of comprehending, as the most learned upon earth can be: yes; *he knows both the existence, and the omnipotence, of the Deity, as much from his own inward experience, as he can possibly do from the visible creation; because he feels himself to be a living witness of them.*]

In order to call forth the practical ends of this description, let us consider,

II. The sentiments it should excite in us—

If the concluding words of the text be understood as

[b] Gen. xxii. 2, 9, 10.
[c] Heb. xi. 36, 37.
[d] 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.
[e] Ps. xlviii. 8.
[f] Isai. xlvi. 1, 2, 6, 7.
[g] Isai. xxx. 1—7.
[h] Ps. lxii. 11.
[i] 2 Chron. xvi. 9.
[k] Jer. xxxii. 41.
[l] Ps. xlii. 11.

as referring to the past, they are an expression of gratitude to God; if, as relating to the future, they denote a cheerful affiance in him. We may properly take them in both these senses, and learn from them to exercise,

1. Gratitude—

[While a sense of our own weakness humbles us in the dust, a view of God's power, and a recollection of the experience we have had of his kindness and all-sufficiency, should kindle in our breasts the liveliest gratitude. Who can "look to the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been digged[m]," and not bless the name of his God? Who can behold the manner in which others are enslaved by sin and Satan, and not adore the God that has made him free? So deeply was David impressed with the mercies he had received, that he not only called on his *soul* to bless God, but declared that "all his *bones* should praise him[n]." And the one inquiry of our hearts should be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me[o]?]

2. Affiance—

[The perfections of God in general may well encourage us to trust in him: but his power, together with his disposition to exercise it on our behalf, should lead us to place in him the most unbounded confidence. Difficulties should all vanish, and appear as nothing, when we reflect on him who is engaged for us. The same power that "made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over[p]," can smooth all obstructions in our way[q], and make our mountains to become a plain[r]. We therefore should trust all our concerns in his hands[s], with an assured hope that we shall never be confounded[t].]

INFER,

1. How little ground is there for *the excuses of the presumptuous!*

[You are ready to vindicate your ungodly ways, by saying, "I *cannot* live as God requires." But is not God able, yea, and willing too, to assist you? And if you will not seek his assistance, does not the blame rest wholly with yourselves? Know that, however you may justify yourselves now, there is a day coming when you will stand speechless before him.]

2. How little ground is there for *the fears of the desponding?*

[We are but too apt to faint in difficulties, and to think them

[m] Isai. li. 1, 2. [n] Ps. xxxv. 9, 10. [o] Ps. cxvi. 12. & ciii. 1, 2.
[p] Isai. li. 10. [q] Isai. xl. 4. [r] Zech. iv. 7.
[s] Prov. xvi. 3. [t] Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

them insurmountable: but if we would habituate ourselves more to look at the power of God, we should proceed with confidence and courage. "Let the weak then say, I am strong." Let them "know in whom they have believed, that He is able to keep that which they have committed to him[u]."]

[u] 2 Tim. i. 12.

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## CCCLXXXII.

### SORROWS AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Ps. lxix. 1—4. *Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty. Then I restored that which I took not away.*

SACRED is the retirement of a penitent, and hallowed is the sanctuary where he is pouring out his soul before God: nor could the most obdurate sinner overhear his confessions and supplications, his cries and tears, his importunate pleadings and heart-rending groans, without being filled with awe and reverence. Let us draw nigh then with holy awe to the recesses of that chamber, where, not a sinful creature like ourselves, but our incarnate God, the Saviour of the world, is pouring out his soul under a load of sins imputed to him, and of sorrows the punishment of sin[a]. He it is that in the psalm before us is saying, "Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul." David, it is true, was the writer of the psalm; and in parts of it may be considered as speaking chiefly, if not entirely, of himself: but in other parts he speaks so entirely in the person of the Messiah whom he typified, that we can scarcely apply the words to any other. Nor whilst we assert this are we in any danger of erring; because our blessed Lord himself, and the Evangelists who wrote his life, and St. Paul also, all concur in putting this very construc-

[a] Heb. v. 7.

construction upon the psalm, and in citing various parts of it as actually accomplished in Christ. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up[b]," is applied to Christ on one occasion; and on another, "They hated me without a cause[c]." His general deportment is said to have been predicted in those words, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me[d]." At his crucifixion was fulfilled that remarkable prophecy, "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink[e]." Even to Judas who betrayed him is one portion of it applied, "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein[f]." After such authorities as these, we do not hesitate to interpret our text as referring to the sufferings of Christ, and as describing,

I. Their overwhelming nature—

If David, as a type, had many things to suffer, much more had that Saviour whom he typified. We will not however speak of his sufferings during the whole period of his sojourning on earth, but of those only which he endured in the closing scenes of his life, and which seem more particularly referred to in the psalm before us. That we may have a more distinct view of them, we will notice,

1. Those which were previous to his apprehension—

["He had indeed a fearful prospect before him," a bloody "baptism to be baptized with; and how was he straitened till it should be accomplished[g]!" When the time for its accomplishment drew nigh, his "soul was so troubled, that he knew not what to say." *As a man*, he felt disposed to deprecate his sufferings, and to be saved from that hour that was fast approaching: but, *as our Mediator*, he would not recede, because he had come into the world for the express purpose of suffering all that was due to our sins[h]. In the garden of Gethsemane his sorrows came yet more heavily upon him, so that he cried, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death[i]." On this occasion he cried repeatedly, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me[k]!" And such was the agony of his soul, that "he

[b] John ii. 17. [c] John xv. 25. [d] Rom. xv. 3.
[e] John xix. 29. [f] Acts i. 20. [g] Luke xii. 50.
[h] John xii. 27. with ib. ver. 23, 32, 33.
[i] Matt. xxvi. 37, 38. [k] ib. ver. 39—44.

"he sweat great drops of blood" from every pore of his body[l]. To this period in particular we may suppose the petitions in our text to refer: for then "he offered up his supplications with strong crying and tears[m]:" and such were the intenseness of his agony, and the ardour of his importunity, that "his throat was dried," "his eyes failed," his whole nature was exhausted[n], and he needed "an angel to be sent from heaven to strengthen him[o]." It must be remembered, that in all this time no man had approached to hurt him: and therefore we are sure that his sorrows proceeded from "the powers of darkness" who were now let loose upon him[p], and from the hand of God himself, who now concurred to inflict upon him[q] the curse due to our iniquities[r], which by a covenant-engagement he had undertaken to sustain[s].]

2. Those which he sustained during his trial—

[It was no slight aggravation of his troubles that he was betrayed into the hands of his murderers by a kiss from one of his own Disciples, and that "one who had eaten bread with him lifted up his heel against him[t]." And when he was seized and bound, he was yet further wounded in his soul by the intemperate zeal of another of his Disciples, who, instead of submitting with meekness to the will of God, sought to destroy the adversaries of his Lord[u]. From the garden he was hurried to the palace of the high priest, and, subsequently, from one tribunal to another, only to be treated with all manner of indignities, and to be denied that justice which his judges pretended to administer. How inconceivably painful to his mind must it have been, to be arrayed in mock majesty, to be made an object of profane scoffing, to be smitten, and buffeted, and spit upon, and loaded with all manner of accusations, and all this time not to have so much as one of the many myriads whom he had healed to bear testimony in his favour[w]; yea, even his own Disciples having forsaken him, one indeed excepted, whose presence only aggravated his sorrow, by his impious oaths, and pertinacious denial of his Lord. Even a measure that was adopted with a view to preserve his life, became a source of still more aggravated woe. Pilate hoped, that, by scourging him, he should pacify those who sought his life: and, the order being given, "the ploughers ploughed upon his back and made long their furrows[x]:" but "the whole multitude with insatiate fury cried out, Crucify him, crucify him[y]!" and demanded that Barabbas, who was a robber and a murderer, should be preferred before him. Thus was the imma-

[l] Luke xxii. 44. [m] Heb. v. 7. [n] ver. 3. [o] Luke xxii. 43.
[p] Luke xxii. 53. [q] Isai liii. 10. [r] Gal. iii. 13.
[s] Ps. xl. 6—8. [t] John xiii. 18. [u] Matt. xxvi. 51, 52.
[w] ver. 20. [x] Ps. cxxix. 3. [y] See ver. 4.

immaculate Lamb of God condemned to suffer the most cruel and ignominious of all deaths, even the accursed death of the cross.]

3. Those which were consummated in his death—

[From Pilate's bar he was dragged away to execution. Laden with the cross to which he was to be affixed, he sank under the load, which therefore another was compelled to bear to the place of execution. To this he was fastened with nails through his hands and feet; and then was he raised a naked bloody spectacle to all his enemies. Ah! with what taunts was he then assailed, assailed even by the thieves, who on either side of him were suffering the same punishment! One would have thought that in such a situation at least he might become an object of pity: but no pity was found in the hearts of his blood-thirsty enemies: and their professed readiness to assuage his anguish, was only an impious mockery, and a cruel insult: they gave him "gall and vinegar to drink[a]." But the heaviest load which he had to sustain was laid upon him by other hands than those of man, even by the hands of his heavenly Father. Man could only touch his body: the wounds inflicted on his soul, proceeded immediately from God, who then "was pleased to bruise him," and to punish in him the iniquities of a ruined world. All his other sufferings he endured with lamb-like silence: but this forced from him that heart-rending complaint, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" The darkness which at mid-day, for the space of three hours, veiled the whole land, was a sad emblem of his state, under the agonies of expiring nature, and the wrath of a sin-avenging God. At last, having drunk the very last dregs of that cup which had been put into his hands, he bows his head, and gives up the ghost. "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow[a]?"]

After this slight sketch of our Redeemer's sufferings, let us proceed to consider,

II. Their vicarious use—

It might be said of David under many of his persecutions, that "he restored that which he took not away:" for certainly he exercised forbearance, and forgiveness, and a returning of good to a very extraordinary extent. But a greater than David is here. That glorious person whose sufferings we have been contemplating, suffered not for himself, but for us: "He was cut off, but *not for himself*[b]:"

1. It was not for his own sins—

[He was pure and perfect. His very examinations proved that

[a] ver. 21. [a] Lam. i. 12. [b] Dan. ix. 26.

that in this respect he was fit to be an offering for the sins of others, "a lamb without blemish, and without spot." As he had before challenged his enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" so the more they laboured to load him with guilt, the more clear and manifest his innocence appeared. His Judge, his fellow sufferer, his executioner, all proclaimed him innocent. The reason of his death, and his fitness for it, are stated in few words by his beloved Disciple, "He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin."]

2. It was for the sins of others—

[In all that he endured, he was our substitute and surety. We had contracted the debt, which he paid: we had sold our inheritance, which he shed his blood to redeem. This is the account given us throughout the whole Scriptures. His sacrifice was prefigured by all the sacrifices under the Levitical law, which in expiating the sins of those who offered them, and in restoring sinners to the favour of their God, might be said to "restore that which they took not away." But this use of his sufferings is not left to be gathered from types and shadows: it was declared by the Prophets in the most express terms. "He hath *borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows*[c]:" yes; "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all[d]." To the same effect speak his Apostles also. St. Paul says, that "He who knew no sin was made sin, that is, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him[e]." And St. Peter tells us, that "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "suffered for sins, the just for (in the room of) the unjust[f]." This glorious mystery may be not unfitly illustrated by St. Paul's conduct towards the penitent Onesimus. Onesimus had robbed his master Philemon. After his conversion by the ministry of Paul, the Apostle sought to restore him to the love and confidence of his Master; and engaged for that end to replace from his own funds the money that Onesimus had stolen: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account: I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it[g]." Thus did the Lord Jesus Christ, while yet he was in the bosom of his Father, undertake for us; and thus in due time he "laid down his own life a ransom for us."]

What an instructive mystery is this! We SEE in it,

1. The proper ground for faith—

[To what, or to whom, shall we look to reconcile us to God? Can

[c] Isai. liii. 4. [d] ib. ver. 5, 6. [e] 2 Cor. v. 21.
[f] 1 Pet. ii. 24. & iii. 18. [g] Philem. ver. 18, 19.

Can we "restore what we have taken away?" or will any one else undertake to restore it for us? What compensation can we make for our violations of God's law? What offering can we make, that shall satisfy the claims of divine justice? or what can we do to compensate for the glory of which we have robbed our God? Alas! to make the attempt, or entertain the thought, were vain in the extreme. But Jesus has by his own obedience unto death made full satisfaction for all our sins. Have we poured contempt upon the law? He "has magnified the law, and made it honourable[h]." Have we brought dishonour on our God? He has glorified every one of the divine perfections more, infinitely more, by his obedience unto death, than they ever could have been glorified either by the perfect obedience, or the eternal condemnation, of the whole human race[i]. He then is worthy to be confided in as a Saviour: he is a sure foundation whereon to build all our hopes for time and for eternity. Hence he says, (and may God give to every one of us grace to comply with the invitation!) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else[k]."]

2. The strongest motive for love—

[What shall induce us to love the Saviour, if the contemplation of his vicarious sufferings will not? Can we think of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich[l];" can we think of this, I say, and not have our souls inflamed with love and gratitude to him? Surely such love must constrain us to admire him, to adore him, to magnify him, to serve him with all our faculties and all our powers. The very stones would cry out against us, if we did not break forth, as it were, in continual Hosannas to our adorable Benefactor.]

3. The safest rule for obedience—

[We must expect to be, in a greater or less degree, conformed to our Saviour in his sufferings, if ever we would be conformed to him in his glory. From men we must expect persecutions for his sake. From Satan we shall meet with the same violent assaults. From God himself too must we occasionally experience the hidings of his face, and the chastisements of his rod: for, "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" But in our troubles we must imitate our blessed Lord, and spread them before our heavenly Father "with strong crying and tears." The proper language for us is that which was used by him[m]——— And, as far as our afflictions proceed from men, we must meet them with patience and resignation, or rather, I should say, with returns of kindness and love. We should be ready to "restore

[h] Isai. xlii. 21. [i] John xiii. 31. [k] Isai. xlv. 22.
[l] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [m] ver. 13—18.

store that which we took not away," and to render good for evil, till we have "overcome evil with good[n]." Doubtless this is a difficult and arduous task: but it is one which will be richly recompensed in the performance of it, and will be highly approved of our God in the last day[o]. We may indeed, notwithstanding such conduct, be constrained to "pass through deep waters;" but our God will be with us in the midst of them[p], and bring us through all our tribulations to a state of eternal blessedness and glory[q].]

[n] Rom. xii. 20, 21.
[o] Matt. vi. 14.
[p] Isai. xliii. 2.
[q] Rev. vii. 14, 15.

## CCCLXXXIII.

### THE KING'S ACCESSION.

Ps. lxxi. 7—9. *I am as a wonder unto many: but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not, when my strength faileth.*

THIS day being called The Jubilee, it will be proper to inform you whence that name is given to it. By the Mosaic law, every seventh year was a sabbatical year, or year of rest. At the end of the seventh sabbatical year, that is the 49th, there was a year of universal rest, not to the land only, but to persons of every description: debtors were released, captives liberated, and inheritances restored. This was, as might be expected, a season of peculiar joy. The connexion between that day, and this which we now celebrate, is only in the *time*, the grounds of joy being altogether different. We are called to celebrate the fiftieth year of our Monarch's reign. On this account, I have chosen a subject which I consider as more appropriate to the occasion. The psalm before us was written (we apprehend) after Absalom's rebellion. In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read to you, it will be proper,

I. To consider it in reference to David—

Absalom being dead, and the rebellion suppressed,

David finds himself firmly seated on his throne: on which occasion,

1. He acknowledges the mercies he had received—

[He felt himself most peculiarly circumstanced: his trials had been great, and his deliverances most extraordinary. His hair-breadth escapes from Saul, and afterwards from foreign and domestic enemies, were very numerous ——— He had recently been even driven from his throne by his son Absalom, the partisans of whom were ordered to direct their efforts exclusively against him: yet from this danger also had he been delivered: so that he seemed to all to be under the peculiar protection of Heaven. His mind too had in all these trials been wonderfully preserved from any thing vindictive, or unworthy of his high character. On all these accounts he was "a wonder unto many."

There was indeed a reason for these mercies, which his enemies had no idea of: "he had made God his refuge." When persecuted by men, he betook himself to prayer, and "encouraged himself in God:" Thus under all circumstances he had "God for his glory and defence."]

2. He makes a suitable improvement of them—

[*He renders thanks to God for his past favours.*—In this the Psalmist was so exemplary, that he seems frequently to breathe almost the very language of heaven itself ——— In this too he is distinguished from almost all other saints: others abound in prayer, but he in praise ———

*He next prays for a continuance of these favours.*—He well knew that he could no longer be safe than whilst he was under the care of the Almighty; and that now in his advanced age he needed, if possible, more than ever the guidance and protection of Heaven ——— Hence he prayed that God would "not cast him off in his old age, nor forsake him when his strength failed him."]

Such is the import of the passage. Let us now,

II. Accommodate it to the circumstances of this day—

Well may we at this time acknowledge the mercies of God to us—

[Our king may truly be said to be "a wonder unto many," whether we consider the *length*, or the *prosperity*, of his reign. Twice only, within the space of a thousand years, has any monarch of ours reigned so long as to see a jubilee kept on his account. And if we consider the state of the world, it is truly wonderful, that, after so many difficulties as we have encountered,

we

we should stand so eminent among the nations. Some indeed are fond of representing us as in a distressed and fallen state. But let such persons compare us with all the other nations of Europe, and they will see, that, whilst all of them have fallen a sacrifice to the politics or arms of France, we are as rich and potent as at any period of our history. That we have burthens to bear, is certain: but it is very unfair to ascribe them to our Governors. They have arisen out of the circumstances of the world around us; in which we were of necessity involved; and from which we could no more disengage ourselves, than we could exempt our nation from the physical motion of the globe.]

We should also make a similar improvement of them—

[*Many are the grounds which we have for praise and thanksgiving:* and our mouths may well "be filled with God's praise all the day." On this day especially we are called to manifest our gratitude both in a way of spiritual, and, if I may so speak, of carnal joy. Some, in their zeal for spiritual joy, forget that we consist of body as well as of a spiritual part; and that in the Scriptures we have numerous instances of national gratitude expressed by the combined exercise of spiritual and carnal joy. Such was that holy feast which David himself, together with his people, kept, not long after he had written this psalm[a]. And it is truly gratifying to think, that, through the benevolence of the rich, all the poorer classes of society are enabled to participate, in a more than ordinary measure, the bounties of Providence, and to share in the general joy.

*Yet have we also peculiar need of prayer.*—At this moment our Enemy is disengaged from other contests, and enabled to direct all his force against us. Our own Government also is unhappily disunited, and our aged king begins to find "his strength fail him." What, in such a state, shall we do, if God forsake us? We have need to pray unto him "not to cast us off." Our prosperity hitherto has doubtless been in a great measure owing to this, that we "have made God our refuge." Both king and people, when compared with other nations, have been exemplary in this. Let us continue to seek Him more and more: and then, whatever be our state on earth, we shall keep an eternal jubilee in heaven.]

[a] 1 Chron. xxix. 20—22.

## CCCLXXXIV.

### EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT.

Ps. lxxii. 6—11. *He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts: yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him.*

THE priesthood of Christ is that to which our attention is principally called in the New Testament; the Epistle to the Hebrews being almost exclusively written upon that subject: but in the Old Testament there seems to be a far more studied exhibition of his kingly office. The whole Levitical law indeed *typically* displayed his priestly character: but the Prophets continually, *in the most express terms*, declared, that the person, who was to be "a child born and a son given," should have "the government upon his shoulder[a]," and that an universal and everlasting dominion should be committed to him[b]. The psalm before us is altogether occupied in describing the nature of his government, and the blessings which should result from it. There was doubtless some reference to Solomon, who was the first of the Israelites that was both "a king, and a king's son[c]:" but the language in many parts cannot with any truth or propriety be applied to him: it can relate to none but Him who was greater than Solomon, even to the Messiah, whose glory no words can adequately describe.

The sublime passage which we have selected for our meditation at this time, will lead us to shew,

I. The nature of Christ's government—

It has generally happened, that those whose power has been most absolute have been most tyrannical in

[a] Isai. ix. 6, 7. [b] Dan. vii. 13, 14. [c] ver. 1.

in their use of it; and that they have sought rather the aggrandizement of themselves than the good of their subjects. But the administration of Christ, like the influence of the heavens, is

1. Gently operative—

[" The showers gently descending on the parched ground, or the new-mown grass," insinuate themselves in a silent and imperceptible manner to the roots, and cause the suspended powers of vegetation to exert themselves with renewed vigour. It is thus that Christ, by his word and Spirit, renovates the soul. He comes not with the sanctions of the law, which, like an impetuous torrent or a desolating tempest, spread terror and dismay: he descends to us rather in mild invitations and gracious promises, which, through the effectual influences of his Spirit, penetrates the recesses of the heart, and give life and vigour to the whole man. When once we are *cut down*, as it were, and made to feel our need of him, then he pours upon us the riches of his grace, to soften the hardness of our hearts, and to invigorate their withered faculties. As it was not by "the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, that God wrought upon Elijah, but by the still small voice," at the sound of which the prophet "wrapped his face in his mantle[d];" so it is with respect to the secret visits of our Lord. When he is pleased to speak to us in the mild accents of his love, *then* the heart is dissolved in tenderness and contrition, or sweetly elevated in devout and grateful adorations.]

2. Richly productive—

[The sickly plants, when watered, raise up their drooping head, and bring forth, each according to its nature, their proper fruits. Thus, "in the day of Christ's" descent upon the souls of the "righteous, they flourish:" and "peace," the first-fruit of the Spirit, "abounds within them." The image in the text beautifully represents the change which is produced, when "a season of refreshing comes from the presence of the Lord:" the person thus highly favoured "flourishes" like the palm-tree; he becomes as "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season: his leaf does not wither; and whatsoever he doeth, it prospers[e]." If the sun of persecution arise upon him, it does not now scorch him and destroy his root[f], but rather calls into activity his vital energies; and serves only to display with fuller evidence the communications he has received. Nothing now robs him of his peace. Much as he laments his former iniquities, they no longer disturb his peace, because the guilt of them is washed away in "the fountain opened for sin." Nor does the prospect of death and judgment appal him, because "he knows

[d] 1 Kin. xix. 11—13. [e] Ps. xcii. 12, 13. & i. 3.
[f] Matt. xiii. 6, 21. with Jer. xvii. 8. & Hos. xiv. 5—7.

knows in whom he has believed," and that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." His rapturous joys may intermit and subside, but his peace shall continue "as long as the moon endureth."]

A due consideration of these things will lead us to rejoice in,

II. The extent of his dominion—

Earthly monarchs have vainly imagined themselves possessed of universal empire: but it is to Christ alone that this truly and properly belongs. His dominion extends itself over,

1. The most distant places—

[Solomon's empire was the most extensive of any that was governed by Jewish kings. It reached from the river Euphrates to the Red Sea; and comprehended all the countries between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean: "it was from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." But Christ has literally "the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." His kingdom was speedily erected in every part of the known world: and at this moment there are multitudes in every civilized nation under heaven, yea, amongst barbarians also and savages, who acknowledge him as their supreme Governor, and render the most cheerful obedience to his commands. Already is that prophecy fulfilled, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and *in every place* incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering[g]." In this therefore we have a pledge that the knowledge of him "shall yet more extensively prevail, and shall one day cover the earth as the waters cover the sea[h]."]

2. The most exalted personages—

[It was said of Solomon, in reference to the fore-mentioned countries, that "all the kings of the earth sought his presence, and brought presents to him; and that he reigned over them[i]." Nominally too, a great multitude of kings are subject unto Christ: but, alas! his real subjects have hitherto been few among them. What Paul complained of in his time has been verified in all succeeding ages to the present day; "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called[k]." But the time is coming when the most potent monarchs upon earth shall become his willing subjects, and "bow down themselves, and lick the dust before him," in a humble acknowledgment of their entire dependence

[g] Mal. i. 11.
[h] Isai. xi. 9. & Zech. xiv. 9.
[i] 2 Chron. ix. 23, 24, 26.
[k] 1 Cor. i. 26.

pendence on him, and of their unreserved devotion to his will[k]. "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings:" and if any will not bend to the sceptre of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron[l].]

INFER,

1. The folly of refusing submission to him—

[The word of Jehovah is pledged, that "the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ[m]:" yea, the Lord Jesus Christ himself hath "sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear[n]." To what purpose then shall we hold out against him, when we know what must infallibly be the issue of the contest? He has told us what he will say to his attendants in the last day; "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me[o]." Let us then be wise in time: let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish[p]."]

2. The blessedness of being his faithful subjects—

[It is a rich blessing to live under a mild and equitable Government. But no earthly monarch, however well disposed, can render his subjects happy, like the adorable Jesus. He gives us access to him at all times, and sheds forth upon us his benign influences, whereby our spirits are revived, and our souls strengthened. What Solomon speaks figuratively in reference to earthly kings, is literally true with respect to him; "In the light of the King's countenance is life; and his favour is like a cloud of the latter rain[q]." "Happy then art thou, O Israel! Who is like unto thee[r]?" "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him, and redeemed him; and let the Children of Zion be joyful in their King[s]."]

[k] This seems to be the true meaning of "*licking the dust.*" Compare Isai. xlix. 23.

[l] Ps. ii. 9. [m] Rev. xi. 15. [n] Isai. xlv. 23.
[o] Luke xix. 27. [p] Ps. ii. 10—12. [q] Prov. xvi. 15.
[r] Deut. xxxiii. 29. [s] Ps. cxlix. 2.

## CCCLXXXV.

### THE PERPETUITY AND EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

Ps. lxxii. 17. *His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.*

NONE of the Prophets, except Isaiah, have written so copiously and so plainly respecting Christ as David. His prophecies are very frequently referred to in the New Testament; and their accomplishment in Jesus is frequently asserted, incontestably proved, and copiously illustrated. The psalm before us was most probably the last that David penned. It was written at the close of his life, on occasion of Solomon's coronation. The dying monarch hearing that his son Adonijah had usurped his throne, gave immediate orders that Solomon should be anointed with the holy oil, and placed upon the throne, and be proclaimed king throughout all his dominions; that by this means his oath to Bathsheba respecting the succession of Solomon might be fulfilled, and the nation be rescued from the calamities in which a disputed succession might involve it[a]. The psalm begins with a prayer for Solomon, and proceeds to foretell the peace, glory, extent, duration, and happiness of his government. But beyond a doubt, a greater than Solomon is here: the Messiah himself is manifestly referred to; and the words of our text must be considered as describing *his* kingdom:

I. Its perpetuity—

[The names, not of the Jewish monarchs only, but also of many heroes of antiquity, have been handed down to us, and probably will be transmitted to the latest generations. But there are several points of view in which the remembrance of Jesus' name differs widely from that of any other person whatever.

*It is transmitted to us in a way of filiation.*—Other names come down to us by means of historic records: but that of our blessed Lord "is continued," or propagated, (as the word means) in the same way as the name of a father is continued in his

[a] 1 Kin. i. 33—35.

his children. Children were born to him by the preaching of his Gospel; and, after him, were called Christians: from that period, others have risen up, in constant succession, to perpetuate his name: nor shall the line ever be broken: "instead of the fathers there shall be children, who shall make his name to be remembered in all generations[b]."

*It is heard with the same regard that it ever was.*—There was a time when the name of Cæsar or of Alexander made whole nations tremble: but who fears them now? What is their love or their hatred unto us? What is Solomon himself to us? We admire his character; but for his person we have no regard. But it is not thus with the sacred name of JESUS. We tremble at it with a holy awe; we love it, as expressing all that is amiable and endearing. We dread his displeasure above all things, and covet his favour more than life itself. And as long as the sun shall continue its course, so long shall the name of Jesus be venerated and adored.

*It "endures" in spite of all the endeavours that have been made to blot out the remembrance of it from under heaven.*—No sooner was the name of Jesus exalted by the preaching of the Apostles, than the Rulers exerted all their power to suppress it: they beat and imprisoned the preachers, and menaced them with yet severer punishment, if they should presume to speak any more in his name[c]. Thus also, in all subsequent ages, "the potentates of the earth have taken counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us[d]." What name, like that of Jesus, is proscribed at this day? We may descant upon the virtues of antient Sages; and the more light we can throw upon their characters, the more acceptable we shall be in every company: but let us speak of Jesus, let us set forth his transcendent excellencies, and expatiate upon all the wonders of his love, and we shall excite in our hearers nothing but disgust. But has this confederacy prevailed to banish his name? No; rather, "the more his people has been afflicted, the more they have grown and multiplied:" and however earth and hell may combine their efforts to efface his memory, or diminish his influence, "He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them, and have them in derision[e]."]

## II. Its excellency—

[The administration of Solomon was attended with great benefit to his people: and such a king as he must be considered as a rich blessing to any nation. But there are many benefits which it is not in the power of any king to communicate. What can a creature do to mitigate our pains, or to rescue us from the dominion

[b] Ps. xlv. 16, 17. & cxlv. 4—6. [c] Acts iv. 17, 18. & v. 28, 40.
[d] Ps. ii. 2. [e] ib. ver. 4.

dominion of unbridled lusts? It is otherwise with the Lord Jesus: he can impart to his subjects whatever blessings they need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity. Do we desire the pardon of our sins? We may be justified freely through his blood[f]. Do we long for peace of conscience? He has left it to his subjects as a legacy[g], and gives them a peace which passeth all understanding[h]. Do we stand in need of strength? Through him we shall be enabled to do all things[i]. Do we extend our desires to all the glory of heaven? "In him we may be saved with an everlasting salvation[k]." It is not sufficient to say that the subjects of Christ's kingdom *may be* thus blessed; for they actually *are* so: there is not one in all his dominions who is not thus highly favoured. If we consult the Prophets, they declare this uniformly; and represent them all as saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[l]." If we consult the Apostles, they declare, that every blessing we enjoy is "IN HIM, even IN HIM;" yea, that "IN HIM we are blessed with all spiritual and eternal blessings[m]."]

## III. Its universality—

[The greatest monarchs of this world have had a very limited sway; and many who have been called their subjects have been so rather in name than in reality. But Christ's dominion shall be strictly and literally universal: "the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ[n]." Already there are some of all nations who submit to his government. We may go to the most uncultivated parts of the earth, where human nature seems but little elevated above the beasts, and there we shall find some who acknowledge him as their sovereign Lord. But his dominion is certainly at present very limited. There is a time however coming, when "all nations shall call him blessed." The rich and great shall take upon them his yoke; according as it is said, "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him[o]." The poor and mean also shall devote themselves to his service, according to that prediction, "Holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses[p]." Thus shall "all know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest[q]." As at this present time all the subjects of his kingdom are blessing and adoring him as the one author of all their happiness, so, at a future period, shall "every knee bow to him, and every tongue confess[r];" and "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory[s]." But it is not till the day of judgment that

[f] Rom. v. 9. [g] John xiv. 27. [h] Phil. iv. 7. [i] Phil. iv. 13.
[k] Isai. xlv. 17. [l] ib. ver. 24, 25.
[m] Eph. i. 3—13. where it is repeated at least eight times. Strange that any should overlook this truth!
[n] Rev. xi. 15. [o] ver. 10, 11. [p] Zech. xiv. 9, 20, 21.
[q] Jer. xxxi. 34. [r] Rom. xiv. 11. [s] ver. 19.

that the full accomplishment of this prophecy shall be seen. Then "a multitude that no man can number, of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues, shall stand before him, and cry with united voices, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb for ever[t]!"]

We cannot more profitably IMPROVE this subject, than by inquiring,

1. What blessings have *we* received from Christ?

[If we be indeed subjects of his kingdom, it cannot fail but that we must have received many blessings at his hands. Has he then "blessed us" with the pardon of our sins? Has he filled us with joy and peace in believing? Has he endued us with grace and strength to subdue our spiritual enemies? and transformed us into his own image in righteousness and true holiness? This is the criterion whereby we must judge of our interest in him: for he cannot be a Saviour to us, unless he save us from the dominion, as well as from the guilt, of all our sins.]

2. What is the disposition of our minds towards him?

[Can we possibly be partakers of his benefits, and feel no disposition to "bless his name?" Surely a grateful sense of his goodness must characterize those who are so greatly indebted to him. To those who believe, he is, and must be, precious ———]

[t] Rev. v. 11, 12. & vii. 9, 10.

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## CCCLXXXVI.

### THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO ISRAEL.

Ps. lxxiii. 1. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

THE aversion which men usually feel to a vindication of God's absolute sovereignty, proceeds from an idea, that the exercise of it would be repugnant to his other perfections of goodness and mercy. But there is no just foundation for this conceit: nor is there any reason why we should doubt the sovereignty of God, any more than any other of his attributes. That God does dispense his favours according to his own will is an undeniable truth: how else can we account for his taking one nation from the midst of another nation, and forming them for his

his peculiar people, and giving them his righteous laws, and expelling seven nations from the land of Canaan in order to give it to his chosen people for their inheritance? But however freely he exercises his own prerogative in this respect, he will take care that his final appointment of men's states shall accord with perfect equity: he even calls the day in which that decision shall pass, "The day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The truth is, that though God has no respect to men's moral characters in the *first* communications of his mercy, he invariably transforms the objects of that mercy in such a manner, as to make it suitable and proper that he should confer upon them the ultimate and everlasting tokens of his love. The Israel of old, and those to whom that name at this time belongs, were, and are, a chosen people: but all the true Israel are renewed in the spirit of their minds; they are "such as are of a clean heart;" and therefore they are such as may reasonably hope to experience the transcendent goodness of their God.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The character of Israel—

"All are not Israel, who are of Israel[a]." The true Israel are widely different from those who are only "Israelites after the flesh." They cannot however be known from others by *their outward appearance*. Others may be as modest in their apparel, and as humble in their looks, as they; and yet have no part with them in their more distinctive characters. They cannot be distinguished from others by *their language*. There certainly is a mode of speaking which religious people will adopt: they will be sincere, modest, inoffensive; and will accustom themselves to such speech as, "being seasoned with salt," is calculated to "administer grace to the hearers." But hypocrites may vie with them in this particular also. Nor can they be altogether known from others by *their actions:* for though their actions

[a]Rom. ix. 6.

actions will doubtless be holy, and just, and good, and extremely different from those of the ungodly world, yet Pharisees and formalists may "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and be as punctual and correct in all external duties as any persons whatever.

The true Israelite is known by no external badge, but by "the circumcision of the heart" only[b]. He is of a clean heart: he is clean,

1. From idolatrous regards—

[The very best of ungodly men has some idol in his heart which usurps the throne of God. Pleasure, riches, and honour are the common objects of men's regards: but some, who seem indifferent to these things, are no less in subjection to a carnal love of ease, wherein their happiness principally consists. But the true Christian has taken the Lord for his God; and has determined, through grace, that no rival shall ever be harboured in his bosom. He makes his adorable Saviour the one object of all his trust, his love, and his obedience[c].]

2. From allowed lusts—

[None but those who have embraced the promises of the Gospel have been able to "cleanse themselves from all fleshly and spiritual filthiness:" but "all who are really Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." We say not, that Christians have no lusts remaining in them; (for a man that is crucified may still continue to live a considerable time; and the lusts that are crucified may still live and act:) but their lusts shall never regain the liberty which they once had: the death of their corruptions is irreversibly decreed; and their strength is gradually weakening; and in due time they shall utterly expire. In all other persons, sin of some kind has dominion; but over the Christian "it shall not; because he is not under the law, but under grace."]

3. From sinister and selfish motives—

[All, even the most refined hypocrites, are under the influence of self-seeking and self-complacency. But the true Christian endeavours to consult the glory of his God. He is as jealous of his motives, as of his actions. He knows that *self* is but too apt to mix with what we do; and therefore he labours to counteract its influence, and to do his most common actions to the glory of his God. To please God, to serve God, to honour God, *these* are the ends which he proposes to himself; nor is he ever satisfied with any one action which has not these objects as their true

[b] Rom. ii. 28, 29. [c] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

true and ultimate scope. He that is "an Israelite indeed, is an Israelite without guile[d]."]

Let us now proceed to contemplate,

II. The character of Israel's God—

"God is good to *all*, and his tender mercy is over all his works:" but he is more especially good to Israel: for,

1. He is reconciled to them—

[They once were under his displeasure, even as others: but he has given them repentance unto life; he has accepted them in and through his beloved Son; he has blotted out all their transgressions as a morning cloud; and "he has given them a name better than of sons and of daughters." These are peculiar mercies not vouchsafed to others, whatever be their profession, or whatever their character.]

2. He admits them to most familiar communion with himself—

[Others may have prayed in some peculiar extremity, and may have obtained deliverance from their distress; but "they will not *always* call upon God:" prayer is not their delight; nor have they any freedom of access to God in it. But "the true Israel" are "a people nigh unto God." It is their delight to draw nigh to God at all times, to make known to him their requests on all occasions, and to walk continually in the light of his countenance. He, on the other hand, like a tender parent, condescends to hear and answer their petitions, and reveals himself to them as he does not unto the world. Thus, while others perform prayer as a mere service which they would think it criminal to neglect, *they* account it their highest privilege to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."]

3. He makes all things to work together for their good—

[Many dark and afflictive dispensations do they meet with; but not one more than shall issue in their good. Under the pressure of their trials they may be ready to say, "All these things are against me:" but they shall at last see reason to confess, that "it is good for them that they have been afflicted." God has expressly promised, that "all things should work together for their good;" and he sooner or later fulfils the promise, to every one that loves him, and that trusts in him. The persecutions of men and the temptations of Satan shall ultimately conduce

[d] John i. 47. [e] Ps. xxxi. 19.

duce to this end: "The wrath of men and devils shall praise him; and the remainder of it," which would counteract his designs, "he will restrain."]

4. He has prepared for them a glorious and everlasting inheritance—

[To others he generally gives a greater measure of earthly wealth: but "for these he has prepared a city;" being "not ashamed to be called their God." The very hope and prospect of that far outweighs all earthly possessions; What then must the actual enjoyment of it be! With what emphasis do those in heaven say, "Truly God is good to Israel!" Well does David exclaim, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!" But we must wait till we come to heaven, before we can form any adequate idea of this glorious subject.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are ignorant of God—

[You are ready to think of God only as a harsh Master, and a severe Judge: but if you knew him aright, you would cry out, with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" The fact is, that while your heart is so corrupt, you cannot form any correct judgment concerning God: your eyes are jaundiced, and you behold all his perfections, yea, and his dispensations too, under false colours: "the light shines; but your darkness doth not apprehend it." If you would know him as he is, pray that he would "create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you." Then shall you be disposed to admire the justice and holiness which you now hate, and, instead of denying his distinguishing grace, you will seek to obtain an interest in it[f].]

2. Those who are tempted to think hardly of God—

[This had been the state of the Psalmist's mind, just before he penned this psalm: and it was on finding his error, that he abruptly exclaimed, "Truly God is good," notwithstanding all I have been tempted to think to the contrary. The same temptations are common with us: and when we see the ungodly triumphing and the righteous afflicted, we are ready to say, "I have cleansed my heart *in vain*, and washed my hands in innocency." But go into the sanctuary, as David did, and then you will learn the different ends of the righteous and the wicked. Take eternity into your estimate, and the delusion will vanish; and you will see, that no state in which an ungodly man can possibly be, is any more to be compared with yours, than the twinkling of a taper is with the light and splendor of the meridian sun.]

[f] See Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

## CCCLXXXVII.

### PROSPERITY OF SINNERS NOT TO BE ENVIED.

Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end.*

TO unenlightened man, there are numberless things in the dispensations of Providence altogether dark and inexplicable: it is the light of Revelation only that enables us to form any just notion respecting them. Moreover, after that men are enlightened, they still are liable to be disconcerted and perplexed by the events which daily occur, in proportion as they lean to their own understandings, and neglect to avail themselves of the means which are afforded them for the regulation of their judgment. Nor has Satan any more powerful instrument wherewith to assault the minds of Believers, than those which he derives from this source. The temptation with which he assaulted our first parents in Paradise, was furnished by the prohibition which God had given them to eat of a certain tree; "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of *every* tree of the garden?" insinuating, that such a prohibition could never have proceeded from a God of love. In like manner, if God have seen fit to deny his people any particular comfort which he has vouchsafed to others, or suffered them to be afflicted in any respect more than others, Satan suggests to their minds, How can these dispensations consist with his professed regard for you as his own peculiar people? Thus their subtle adversary would instil into their minds hard thoughts of God, and a distrust of his providential care. It was in this way that he assaulted the author of the psalm before us, and caused him almost to renounce his confidence in God. The Psalmist himself, (whether it were Asaph, or David, we cannot certainly declare,) tells us, how nearly he was overcome by this temptation: "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped: for I was envious at the foolish, when I

saw

saw the prosperity of the wicked." He proceeds more fully to state the difficulty with which his mind was harassed, and the way in which the snare was broken: and as the subject is of universal interest, we will draw your attention to it, by stating,

I. The difficulty—

It is frequently seen that the wicked prosper, whilst the godly are grievously oppressed—

[The godly are for the most part "a poor and afflicted people[a]." They are objects of hatred and contempt to an ungodly world[b], and they suffer much from the unkind treatment which they meet with[c]. Not unfrequently, "their greatest foes are those of their own household." From the hand of God also they receive many strokes of fatherly correction, from which the avowed enemies of God are in great measure exempt[d]. It is necessary also, with a view to the accomplishment of God's purpose of love towards them, that they should, for the most part, "be in heaviness through manifold temptations[e]."

The wicked, on the contrary, frequently pass through life without any particular trials[f]: having nothing to humble them, they are lifted up with pride, (which they glory in as their brightest ornament[g];) and are encompassed with violence, as their daily habit: they gratify their sensual appetites, "till their eyes stand out with fatness[h]:" they despise all restraint, whether human or divine[i]; and even atheistically question, Whether God notices and regards the conduct of his creatures[k]. These are the persons who generally get forward in life, and engross to themselves the wealth and honours of a corrupt world. Doubtless, in countries where the rights of individuals are secured by just laws and a righteous administration, this inequality will be less apparent, than in places, where there is more scope afforded for the unrestrained exercise of fraud and violence: but in every place there is ample evidence, that worldly prosperity is the attainment, not of spiritual, but of carnal minds———]

This, to the carnal mind, presents a difficulty not easy to be explained—

[There is in the mind of man a general idea that the Governor of the Universe will testify by his present dispensations his love for virtue, and his hatred of iniquity. The friends of Job carried this notion so far, that, without any other evidence than what

[a] Zeph. iii. 12. [b] John xv. 19. [c] 2 Tim. iii. 12.
[d] Heb. xii. 6—8. [e] 1 Pet. i. 6. [f] ver. 4, 5.
[g] Dan. v. 29. with ver. 6. [h] ver. 7.
[i] ver. 8, 9. Mark the language of ver. 9. [k] ver. 11.

what arose from his peculiar trials, they concluded, that *he* must of necessity have been a hypocrite and deceiver, whom justice at last had visibly overtaken. Nor could Job himself understand, how it should be, that the prosperity of the wicked should be so great, whilst he, who had walked in his integrity, was so overwhelmed with troubles[l]. Even the prophet Jeremiah, who might be supposed to have a deeper insight into divine truth than Job, was stumbled at the same thing[m]: and therefore we must not wonder that it operates as a temptation in the minds of the generality.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the difficulty of accounting for these things was certainly very great: for all the sanctions of the Law were almost, if not altogether, of a temporal nature: temporal prosperity was promised, and *that* too in very general and unqualified terms, as the reward of obedience; and temporal judgments were threatened as the punishment of disobedience; and consequently, when the wicked prospered and the righteous were oppressed, it seemed as if the Providence of God were in direct opposition to his word. Nor did Moses alone give ground for such expectations: even David himself had said, that "they who sought the Lord should want no manner of thing that was good[n]." Nay more, the same language is used in the New Testament: If we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all earthly comforts shall be added unto us." And again, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth[o]." Now it may be asked, How can this consist with the exaltation of the wicked, and the almost universal depression of the righteous, of whom it may be said, that "they are plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning[p]?"]

But the Psalmist, having stated his difficulty, gives us,

II. The solution—

To the carnal mind the difficulty is insurmountable: but "if we enter into the sanctuary of God," it will vanish instantly. There we shall see the lamentable state of the wicked in the midst of their prosperity;

1. The danger of their way—

["Their feet are set in slippery places," where it is, humanly speaking, impossible for them to stand. This may appear a strong assertion; but it is not at all too strong: it is the assertion of our Lord himself[q]———Indeed, it is with great justice said by

[l] Job xxi. 7—13. [m] Jer. xii. 1. [n] Ps. xxxiv. 10. & lxxxiv. 11.
[o] Matt. v. 5. & vi. 33. [p] ver. 14.
[q] Mark x. 23—27.

by Solomon, that "the prosperity of fools destroyeth them[r];" for it almost universally generates those very dispositions which are so strongly depicted in the psalm before us[s]. If riches increase, we are immediately ready "to set our heart upon them[t];" and to trust in them rather than in God[u]. They foster pride in the heart of the possessor[x]; and lead not unfrequently to an oppressive conduct towards the poor[y], and to the most daring impiety towards God[z]. Are they then to be envied, who are placed in such perilous circumstances? Are they to be envied, who, when running for their lives, have "their feet laden with thick clay?" Be it so, that the rich have many comforts which the poor taste not of: but what enjoyment can that man have of a feast, who sees a sword suspended over his head by a single hair, and knows not but that it may fall and pierce him the very next minute? So the man who knows his own weakness, and the force of the temptations to which he may be exposed, will be well satisfied to have such a portion only of this world as God sees fit to give him; and will abundantly prefer the eternal welfare of his soul before all the gratifications that wealth or honour can afford him.]

2. The awfulness of their end—

[As God raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, with an intent to shew forth in him his wrathful indignation against sin[a], so he loads with temporal benefits many, who shall finally be made objects of his heavy displeasure for their abuse of them. He bears with them for a season: but "their feet shall slide in due time[b];" and then "they will be cast down into everlasting destruction[c]." O how terrible is their transition in a single instant, from a fulness of all earthly comforts to an utter destitution even of "a drop of water to cool their tongue[d]!" Think of the rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: what a change did he experience the moment that his soul departed from the body! The next thing we hear of him is, that "he was in hell, lifting up his eyes in torment," such as no words can describe, no imagination can conceive[e]. Lazarus, on the contrary, who in this world had not the most common necessaries of life, was enjoying unspeakable and endless felicity in Abraham's bosom. Who that beholds the termination of their career, would not infinitely prefer the temporal estate of Lazarus, even though it should last a thousand years, before all the vanishing gratifications of the man of wealth? If it should be thought that this rich man was more addicted to sin than others, the account we have of him suggests no ground

[r] Prov. i. 32. [s] ver. 6—11. [t] Ps. lxii. 10.
[u] 1 Tim. vi. 17. Luke xii. 19. [x] Prov. xviii. 23.
[y] Jam ii. 6. [z] ib. ver. 7. [a] Rom. ix. 17.
[b] Deut. xxxii. 35. [c] ver. 18. [d] ver. 19.
[e] Luke xvi. 23, 24.

ground for it whatever: on the contrary, it tells us, that his five surviving brethren, who inherited his wealth, were, like him, yielding to the sad influence of the temptations which it offered, and therefore were hastening to that same place of torment, to which he had been consigned[f]. Doubtless it is painful to reflect on the thoughtless security of millions, who, if not guilty of any flagrant enormity, have no conception of the predicament in which they stand. But the Scripture speaks too plainly on this subject to admit of any doubt[g]———Say then, Are these to be envied? Alas! if viewed aright, they must be regarded only as persons accumulating wrath upon their own heads[h]; or as victims fattening for the slaughter[i]: and consequently, their superior prosperity in earthly things affords no ground for complaint to the godly, however destitute they may be, or however afflicted.]

Let us LEARN then from this subject,

1. To mark the motions of our own hearts—

[We greatly deceive ourselves if we imagine that our *actions* afford a sufficient criterion for judging of our state! There are many who indulge in all manner of evil *thoughts*, whilst yet they are restrained by merely political considerations from carrying them into effect. Whilst therefore man sees nothing amiss in us, God may see our "hearts to be full of evil." It was not any overt act that the Psalmist spoke of in our text, but of his thoughts only: and yet he acknowledges, that they had well nigh destroyed and ruined his soul[k]. O let us observe from time to time the various thoughts that arise in our corrupt hearts, (the proud, the vain, the envious, the wrathful, the vindictive, the impure, the covetous, the worldly thoughts,) and let us humble ourselves for them in dust and ashes, and pray, that "the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us!!" If we view ourselves as we really are in the sight of God, we shall see that we may, on many occasions, justly, and without hyperbole, say, "So foolish am I and ignorant, I am even as a beast before thee[l]."]

2. To be satisfied with our condition—

[To Judas was consigned the custody of the stock provided for the daily support of our Lord and his Disciples. What if the other Disciples had envied him that honour? would they have been wise? Judas was a thief: and the pre-eminence he enjoyed, afforded him an opportunity of gratifying his covetous desires, whilst the rest were free from any such temptation. God knows that many of those things which we would fain enjoy, would only

[f] ib. ver. 27, 28.
[g] Ps. xcii. 7. Job xx. 4—7. & xxi. 30. Prov. xxiii. 17, 18.
[h] Rom. ii. 5. [i] Jam. v. 1, 2, 3, 5. [k] ver. 2, 3.
[l] Acts viii. 22. [m] ver. 22.

only prove snares and temptations to our souls. He sees, not only the evil that *does exist*, but the evil also that *might* arise, within us: and he withholds in mercy many things, which he knows would be injurious to our spiritual welfare. How happy had it been for the rich youth in the Gospel, if, instead of being possessed of wealth, he had been as poor as Lazarus himself! It was his wealth alone that induced him to forego all hope of an interest in Christ[m]: and, if he had been a poor man, he might, for aught we know, have been at this moment a blest inhabitant of heaven. Let us then remember, that if God sends us trials which we would gladly escape, or withholds comforts which we would desire to possess, he does it in wisdom, and in love: and in all probability we shall one day see reason to adore him for the things which we now deplore, as much as for any of those benefits in which we are most disposed to rejoice.]

3. To seek above all things the prosperity of our souls—

[Here is full scope for our ambition. We may "covet, as earnestly as we will, the best gifts." We must not indeed *grudge* to any their higher attainments: but we may take occasion from the superior piety of others to aspire after the highest possible communications of grace and peace. Were we to possess the whole world, we must leave it all, and "go as naked out of the world as we came into it." But, if we possess spiritual riches, we shall carry them with us into the eternal world, and have our weight of glory proportioned to them. The operation of *these* upon our souls need not be feared: they bring no snare with them; or, if they be accompanied with a temptation to pride, they will lead us to Him, who will assuredly supply an antidote, to screen us from its injurious effects[n]. If we are "rich towards God," we are truly rich; yea, though we possess nothing in the world besides, we may exult, as "having nothing, and yet possessing all things[o]."]

[m] Mark x. 22. [n] 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. [o] 2 Cor. vi. 10.

## CCCLXXXVIII.

### BENEFIT OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

Ps. lxxiii. 28. *It is good for me to draw near to God.*

THE dispensations of Providence are often so dark and inscrutable, that proud man is ready to question the wisdom of them, and almost to doubt whether they are the result of design or chance. The prosperity of the wicked is more particularly a stumbling-

stumbling-block to those who limit their views to the things of this life. But a more enlarged acquaintance with God and his ways will silence every cavil, and oblige us to confess, that however "clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne." The Psalmist himself for a season was unable to account for the prosperous state of the ungodly, while the righteous were regarded by them as objects of contempt and abhorrence. His reasonings upon the subject could not satisfy his mind: but at last he "went into the sanctuary of God," and there learned to estimate the ways of God by a very different standard, and to think those the most happy who were happy for eternity. In the review of this experience, he was led to acknowledge the more than brutish stupidity of his soul[a], and the benefit which he had received from drawing near to God: "It is good for me," says he, "to draw near to God."

In discoursing on these words, we shall shew,

I. What is meant by drawing near to God—

We must not suppose that any bodily motion is necessary in order to the drawing nigh to God; since he filleth all space, and is "never far from any one of us[b]." The expression in the text imports a drawing nigh to him,

1. With the mind—

[Though "God is a Spirit," and therefore not to be apprehended with bodily eyes, yet man is able, by the exercise of faith, to place him as it were before the eyes of his mind, and thereby to "see Him that is invisible[c]." Nothing can be more absurd or delusive, than to draw a picture of him, as it were, in our imagination, and to present him before us in a way of vision. Whatever visions were granted to men in former times, it is rather *a sense and consciousness of his presence*, than a sight of him as present, which we are to expect. We must not look for such a luminous appearance as Moses saw; but it is our privilege to say with David, "I have set the Lord always before me[d]." When we set God before us, we also set ourselves before him: we summon ourselves into his presence; and endeavour to impress

[a] ver. 22. [b] Acts xvii. 27. [c] Heb. xi. 27. [d] Ps. xvi. 8.

press our minds with the conviction that he discerns our inmost thoughts. In this way we may properly be said to draw near to him; because, though in fact we are no nearer to him than before, yet we are much nearer *in our own apprehension*; and the effect upon our own minds is precisely the same as if the approximation were real.]

2. With the heart—

[The drawing nigh to God is not a work of the understanding only, but also of the heart[dd]: and the exercises of the one are as necessary as those of the other. Indeed the idea of approaching God without suitable affections, is vain; since man cannot remain unaffected in the Divine presence; nor would he be approved of God if he did. It is obvious therefore that an acceptable approach to God must be attended with such emotions, as become a sinner in the presence of his Judge, and a redeemed sinner in the presence of his Lord and Saviour. It must be accompanied with a *fear* of God's majesty, an *admiration* of his goodness, an *affiance* in his mercy, a *love* to his name, a *submission* to his will, a *zeal* for his glory. These various feelings must be expressed in such petitions and acknowledgments as the occasion requires. In short, our drawing nigh to God must somewhat resemble Esther's approach to Ahasuerus. She knew that none but the king could help her; and that she must perish if she did not obtain favour in his sight: and therefore, with much preparation of mind, she humbly presented herself before him, and then offered her petition in the manner she thought most likely to prevail[e].]

Having ascertained the import of drawing nigh to God, we proceed to shew,

II. The benefit arising from it—

There is no other thing under heaven so "good for" the soul, as this[ee]:

1. There is nothing so pleasant—

[We will grant, for argument sake, that the things which this world afford are capable of imparting as much happiness as the votaries of pleasure expect: still the happiness of drawing near to God is incomparably greater. We appear indeed to "speak parables[f]" when we descant on such a subject as this, because the things we affirm can be known only from Scripture and

[dd] 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

[e] Esth. v. 1—4. This whole head might be changed; and, instead of it, one might shew, *How we are to draw nigh to God.* This would be more in the common-place way; but it would be easier, and perhaps more profitable to the lower class of hearers.

[ee] Lam. iii. 25. [f] Ezek. xx. 49.

and experience: and people have an easy way of setting both these aside. The words of Scripture are represented as high Eastern metaphors: and the experience of the primitive saints is supposed to be confined to the earlier ages of the Church. And with respect to the experience of living saints, that is derided as enthusiasm. But there is a blessedness in communion with God, whether man will admit it or not. To the ungodly it is an irksome task to approach God; but to the godly it is their chief joy. The Psalmist justly says, "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee[g]." But how shall we describe this blessedness? How shall we paint the lowly self-abasing thoughts which lead a man to prostrate himself in the very dust before God? How shall we express the wonder and admiration with which he is filled, when he contemplates the goodness of God towards him? How shall we declare the ardour of his feelings when he is adoring that Saviour who bought him with his blood? We do not say, that any man feels at all times the same rapturous and exalted joys; but we do say, that the joys of those who live nigh to God are at some seasons "unspeakable and full of glory[h]," an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself.]

2. There is nothing so profitable—

[Not to mention the pardon and acceptance which flow from communion with God, it is certain that it will *restrain from sin*. The presence of a fellow-creature, yea, even of a child, will restrain men from the commission of crimes, which in secret they would perpetrate without remorse. How much more then would a consciousness of God's presence awe us, if we felt it as we ought[i]! The falls and apostacies of those who profess religion always originate from, or are preceded by, a secret departure of the heart from God.

It will also *console us in trouble*. David, both on this and many other occasions, found prayer the best means of composing his spirit when it was harassed by temptations or persecutions[k]. And did any one ever apply this remedy in vain? When we have complained to man only, we have felt the pressure of our burthens still, and groaned under them as much as ever: but when we have carried our complaints to God, we have almost invariably had our murmurs silenced, our agitations tranquillized, our spirits comforted. God has fulfilled to us his promise, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me[l]."

It will moreover *strengthen us for duty*. We should not so often faint in the way of duty, if we waited more constantly upon

[g] Ps. lxiv. 5. [h] 1 Pet. i. 5. [i] Ps. iv. 4.
[k] ver. 3, 13, 17. See also Ps. lxix. 17, 18. & cxvi. 3—5.
[l] Ps. l. 15.

upon our God. He "would renew our strength as the eagle's[m]:" he would "give us more grace[n]," even "grace sufficient for us." However weak we are in ourselves, we should be "able to do all things through the strength which he would impart unto us[o]." By drawing nigh to God, our humility is increased, our faith invigorated, our hope quickened, our love inflamed, and the whole work of grace advanced in our souls.

Lastly, it will *prepare us for glory*. Nothing transforms us into the Divine image so much as communion with God. When Moses continued with God for a season upon the holy mount, his face contracted a radiance which was visible to all who beheld him. And, though no bright effulgence will now adorn the countenances of those who live nigh to God, yet a glory will shine around their paths, a lustre which will compel others to "take notice of them, that they have been with Jesus[p]." By "beholding his glory they will be changed into the same image[q]," and be progressively fitted to "see him as he is[r]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who never draw near to God at all—

[How many are there of this description! You rather say to him in your hearts, "Depart from us[s]:" and, in so doing, you pass sentence upon yourselves; you even inflict on yourselves, by anticipation, the punishment prepared for you[t]. God assures you, that "all who are far from him shall perish[u]." O that you might tremble at the denunciations of his wrath, and not bring upon yourselves the bitter experience of it in the eternal world!]

2. Those who draw nigh to him, but only in a formal manner—

[Your state is as dangerous and deplorable as if you lived ever so far from God: for it is to no purpose to "draw nigh to him with your lips, while your hearts are far from him[x]." "Bodily exercise profiteth nothing[y]:" you must have "the power of godliness as well as the form[z]." "God is a Spirit: and, if you do not worship him in spirit and in truth[a]," your service is a mockery, and your hope a delusion. Be in earnest therefore in your walk with God: for as your formal duties, whether in the Church or closet, bring with them neither pleasure nor profit, so will they ultimately deceive you to your ruin. On the contrary, if you really draw nigh to God, and "stir up yourselves to lay hold of him," he will draw nigh to you, and load you with his richest benefits[b].]

3. Those

[m] Isai. xl. 31. [n] Jam. iv. 6. [o] Phil. iv. 13. [p] Acts iv. 13.
[q] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [r] 1 John iii. 2. [s] Job xxi. 14. [t] Matt. xxv. 41.
[u] ver. 27. [x] Matt. xv. 8, 9. [y] 1 Tim. iv. 8.
[z] 2 Tim. iii. 5. [a] John iv. 24. [b] Jam. iv. 8.

3. Those who find their happiness in communion with God—.

[This is the character of all the saints: "they are a people nigh unto God[c]:" "truly their fellowship is with God, and with his Son Jesus Christ[d]." It is true, that there is no merit in this; and it arises only from the grace of God, which effectually worketh in them: nevertheless God admires and applauds their conduct: viewing them with a kind of rapture and surprise, he says, "Who is this that hath engaged his heart to approach unto me[e]?" Happy, happy are the people who can say, "Lord, it is I," "Lord, it is I." Continue then and increase your diligence in walking with God. Then you shall not only say *now*, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God;" but you shall one day add with ten-fold emphasis, "It is good for me to have drawn nigh to God:" yes; if *now* you can look back upon your seasons of communion with God as the best and happiest hours of your life, much more shall you, when your intercourse with him shall be more immediate, and you are dwelling in the very bosom of your God.]

[c] Ps. cxlviii. 14. [d] 1 John i. 3. [e] Jer. xxx. 21.

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## CCCLXXXIX.

### DESPONDENCY DEPICTED AND REPROVED.

Ps. lxxvii. 7—10. *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

IT pleases God to deal with men in a great variety of ways: some, in their *bodies*, experience scarce any pain or sickness till the period of their dissolution; whilst others know little of health or ease through the greatest part of their lives. In like manner, the *souls* of some enjoy an almost uninterrupted course of peace and prosperity; whilst others are made to pass through deep waters, and to sustain fiery trials during a great part of their earthly pilgrimage. It is of these last that we propose at this time to speak. The afflictions of Asaph were certainly exceeding heavy: and the account, which

which in the preceding verses he gives of himself, shews, that he may well be considered as a mirror, wherein the Lord's people in all ages may, under their several temptations, behold the workings of their own minds. Scarcely any one can experience a sorer temptation than his[a]. When he wrote this psalm, he was brought through it[b]: but he tells us faithfully, what were his views and feelings under it. He sought the Lord without intermission; but found no comfort[c]: his very recollections of God's character contributed only to augment his grief[d]. To such a degree was his spirit oppressed, that he was deprived of all rest by night, and of all power of friendly communication by day; and he altogether sunk under his trouble[e]. In vain did he call to mind the consolations he had enjoyed under former trials[f], or examine to find the causes of this peculiar dispensation[g]: he thought surely that God himself must have changed, and have cast off that character, which, in appearance at least, he had on all former occasions exhibited: yea, his darling attributes of mercy and truth seemed to have undergone a change, and to have assumed an aspect totally different from that in which they had hitherto been viewed[h].

Happily, however, the snare was broken; and he saw, that these hard thoughts of God had no foundation in truth: they were the result only of his own weakness[i]; and would be effectually removed by a more attentive consideration of all that God had done for his people of old[k].

His temptation was at its height, when he asked the questions recorded in our text. We shall do well therefore to consider,

I. What these questions import—.

They are not to be viewed as subjects of a merely speculative inquiry, but to be taken in connexion with

[a] He seems to have been that Asaph who was contemporary with David. [b] ver. 1. [c] ver. 2. [d] ver. 3. [e] ver. 3, 4. [f] ver. 5, 6. [g] ver. 6. [h] ver. 7—9. [i] ver. 10. [k] ver. 10—20.

with all that agitation of mind that is depicted in the foregoing context. In this view they express,

1. Disquieting apprehensions in reference to himself—

[He had thought in former times, that he was a monument of God's "mercy," and an object of his "favourable" regard: but now he seems as one cast out, and doomed to everlasting misery. It must be remembered, that interrogations, which in our language would imply a negation of the thing inquired about, have frequently in Scripture the force of affirmations[l]: and thus it is in the various questions that are before us, in which therefore there is a very strong degree of apprehension intimated. Yet is this feeeling by no means uncommon at the present day. Many in a season of darkness are led to write bitter things against themselves, and to account all their past profession a continued scene of hypocrisy and self-delusion. They think that they have resisted the Spirit, till they have utterly quenched his sacred motions; yea, that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and placed themselves as it were out of the reach of mercy: and such an unhappy degree of positiveness frequently accompanies these apprehensions, that they read their doom as if it had been already past, and disregard all means of grace as though it were utterly in vain to use them.]

2. Desponding fears in reference to God—

[He properly referred every thing to God as the one source of all good: but instead of deriving comfort from this, he made it an occasion of increased despondency. And thus it is with many; "They remember God, and are troubled." Every attribute of the Deity is brought against them, to aggravate their guilt and insure their condemnation. Even mercy and truth are regarded by them as arrayed in hostile attitude against them, and as uniting their influence on the side of offended justice. His paternal corrections are considered by them as judicial inflictions, and as the forerunners of yet heavier judgments in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. His delays in answering prayer are viewed as absolute refusals, and as decisive proofs of final dereliction. Hence their fears are vented in terms similar to those in the passage before us[m].]

The discovery of the true import of these questions will enable us to discover,

II. Whence they proceed—

Justly did Asaph say, "This is my infirmity:" and a grievous

[l] Jer. ii. 14. & xxxi. 20. [m] Lam. iii. 17, 18.

a grievous infirmity it was. Such questions as his arise,

1. From impatience—

[There is great impatience in the mind of man, yea, even of good men, and especially under any dark and mysterious dispensation. We are apt to think that God is, as it were, bound to hear us, and to interpose, either for the solution of our difficulties, or the removal of our trials, as soon as we call upon him. We cannot wait his leisure. Like Saul, we think he has forgotten us; and, that our enemies will crush us, before he can come to our relief[n]. Thus David was exercised, as he himself tell us: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes[o]." To such a degree was he agitated on one occasion, that he declared, it was altogether in vain that he had served God: "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency[p]." And, as for all that God's saints had spoken from the beginning of the world respecting the grace and mercy and fidelity of God, he did not hesitate to pronounce it all a downright falsehood: "I said in my haste, all men are liars[q]." The prophet Jeremiah too cast reflections even upon God himself, as having deceived him by false promises; "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived[r]." Alas! what a root of bitterness is an impatient spirit! and how greatly does it aggravate the calamities under which we suffer! Surely we should leave times and seasons, whether of trial or consolation, unto God, and say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him[s]."]

2. From unbelief—

[This is the great source of all our disquietude. If we truly believe that God ordered every thing with infallible wisdom, and unbounded goodness, and an inviolable fidelity, we could never be put into such a consternation as is expressed in our text. We should rather lie as clay in his hands; and leave him to fashion us according to his will, and to put us into as many successive furnaces as he sees fit, and to accomplish his own purposes in his own way. We should have it fixed as an immutable principle in our minds, that though "clouds and darkness may be round about him, justice and judgment are the basis of his throne:" and under the influence of this faith, we should adopt the language of the prophet Habakkuk, and say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation[t]."]

Happily

[n] 1 Sam. xiii. 12, 13.
[o] Ps. xxxi. 22.
[p] Ps. lxxiii. 13, 14.
[q] Ps. cxvi. 11.
[r] Jer. xx. 7.
[s] Job xiii. 15.
[t] Hab. iii. 17, 18.

Happily the same authority that points out the source of these questions, shews us also,

III. How they should be answered—

Would we know what God *will do*, we should attentively consider what he *hath done*. We should mark his wonders of old, and observe all the diversified exercises of his perfections towards his people from the beginning of the world, and especially towards the Israelites whom he redeemed from the land of Egypt:

1. How mighty his power!

[When the moment for the deliverance of his people was arrived, not all the power of Egypt could detain them. Difficulties indeed were multiplied, but only for the purpose of displaying more gloriously his power in their behalf. The Red Sea obstructed their flight; but it opened at God's command, and made for his people a passage on dry foot; and then closed again to overwhelm their enemies. Their necessities in the wilderness were such as no human power or wisdom could supply: but this also only tended in the same manner to proclaim His might, who for the space of forty years fed them with bread from heaven, and with water out of the stony rock, and caused their garments never to decay. Be it so then, that our difficulties are great, yea, and insuperable by human power: then will God magnify towards us his power so much the more, and shew, that still, as in former times, he "makes the depths of the sea (not a place for his people to be drowned in, but) a way for the ransomed to pass over[u]."]

2. How rich his mercy!

[Truly it was "not for their righteousness that he brought them out; for they were a stiff-necked people" from the very beginning: and "many a time would he have consumed them for their iniquities, but for his own name's sake, that it should not be dishonoured among the heathen." See their murmurings, their idolatries, their innumerable provocations, and then say, Whether God's grace be not sovereign, and his mercy infinite? And, if such surmises as those suggested in our text arise in our minds respecting him, let us remember, that he is the same God now as in former ages, and that now, as well as in former times, the very chief of sinners, if truly penitent, shall be accepted of him; and that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound[x]."]

3. How mysterious his ways!

[In

[u] Isai. li. 10. [x] Rom. v. 20.

[In the space of a few months God had brought his people to the borders of Canaan; and yet for their murmuring and unbelief he turned them back into the wilderness, and caused them to wander there for forty years, till all that generation, excepting two persons, were swept away. This was most mysterious: yet are we told on infallible authority, that "He led them by *the right* way." In truth, that dispensation has afforded the richest instruction to the Church from that period to the present hour, and will continue to do so to the end of time: and it will be found that his darkest dispensations towards us also are the most replete with instruction to our souls. It is usually those who are most exercised with trials, that know most of themselves, and most of God. Whenever therefore his dealings with us appear strange and inexplicable, let us compose our minds with the reflection suggested toward the close of this psalm, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known[y]."]

4. How sure his promises!

[He had pledged himself to Abraham, that he would bring his posterity into the full possession of the Promised Land: and, though for their iniquities he caused all who came out of Egypt to die in the wilderness, yet he brought their children, who they supposed would fall an easy prey to their enemies, into that good land, and gave it them for their inheritance: and so perfectly did he fulfil his word to them in every respect, that Joshua after many years could appeal to the whole nation, that "not one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God had spoken concerning them; all was come to pass unto them, and not one thing had failed thereof[z]." Thus, if the thought arise in our hearts, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?" our answer must be, "No:" "it is impossible for God to lie[a]:" "his promises in Christ are all yea, and amen[b]:" and "his mercy endureth for ever[c]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are walking in darkness—

[There are changes in the spiritual, as well as in the natural world. We must not any of us expect that our sun shall shine equally at all times with unclouded splendor. Notwithstanding we may truly "fear God and obey the voice of his servants, we may yet be walking in darkness and have no light." But in that state we are directed what to do: we must "trust in the Lord, and stay upon our God[d]." The longest night will have an end: and if we wait patiently upon our God, "his way is prepared as the morning," which, though the night appear exceeding

[y] Isai. li. 10. [z] Josh. xxiii. 14. [a] Heb. vi. 18.
[b] 2 Cor. i. 20. [c] Ps. cxxxvi. 1—26. [d] Isai. l. 10.

exceeding long and tedious, will come at last[e]. He may for wise reasons hide his face from us for a time; but it shall not be for ever[f]. Hear his own answer to the complaints which we are apt to make[ff]———And know, that though "heaviness may endure for a night, joy shall surely come to us in the morning[g]:" if only we wait till the appointed hour, "our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness shall be as the noon day[h]."]

2. Those who enjoy the light of God's countenance—

[O what a privilege, what an unspeakable blessing, is this! Learn to value it aright: and take care that you do not presume upon the mercy vouchsafed unto you. Do not be saying with David, "My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved," lest you provoke "God to hide his face from you, and you be troubled[i]." A slavish fear is doubtless to be avoided on the one hand; but so is a presumptuous security on the other. The true medium is, to "rejoice with trembling[k]," and to unite "the fear of the Lord with the comforts of the Holy Ghost[l]." Be watchful then, that you do not by any unhallowed dispositions "grieve the Holy Spirit[m];" but endeavour to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long[n]."]

[e] Hos. vi. 3. [f] Isai. liv. 7, 8. [ff] Isai. xlix. 14—16.
[g] Ps. xxx. 5. [h] Isai. lviii. 10. [i] Ps. xxx. 7.
[k] Ps. ii. 11. [l] Acts ix. 31. [m] Eph. iv. 30.
[n] Prov. xxiii. 17.

## CCCXC.

### JEWS AND CHRISTIANS COMPARED.

Ps. lxxviii. 8. *A generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.*

HISTORY is universally considered as a source of the most valuable instruction, since it sets before us the actions of men under all the most important circumstances of life, and teaches us what to avoid, and what to follow. But in this point of view the Inspired History is of incomparably greater value than any other, because it portrays the conduct of men under an infinitely greater variety of circumstances than any other history can do, and does it also with far greater truth and certainty. Its importance in this respect is strongly marked by the

the Psalmist in the preceding context. He calls on the whole Jewish nation to listen to him, whilst he sets before them the dealings of Jehovah with their ancestors, and their conduct towards him: and he charges them to impart the information to their children, in order to its being transmitted through successive generations to their latest posterity; that all might learn their obligations to God, and be instructed to avoid the evils into which their ancestors had fallen: "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be, as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God."

With a view to a similar improvement of the subject for ourselves, I will point out,

I. The character of that generation—

To estimate this aright, we must consider what might reasonably have been expected of them—

[No nation under heaven were ever so distinguished by the Divine favour as they. The wonders that were wrought for them in Egypt—their passage through the Red Sea, in which the enemies who followed them were drowned—their being guided by a cloud which afforded them shade by day and light by night—their being nourished for forty years by bread from heaven, and by water, which, issuing from a rock, followed them in all their way—their having the Law written by the finger of God himself given them, together with laws and ordinances for the political and religious government of their nation—their having the river Jordan open a passage for them as the sea had formerly done—the seven nations, greater and mightier than they, all subdued before them—the Promised Land in due time put into their possession; and the worship of God, with all its attendant privileges and blessings, established amongst them—these were favours peculiar to that nation, and elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth. Respecting their superior obligations to love and serve God on account of these things, Moses made an appeal to their forefathers, which appeal may still be made to their descendants at the present day[a]———

Now, I ask, what might reasonably be expected of a people so favoured? Might it not be supposed, that they would love their

[a] Deut. iv. 32—35.

their God supremely, and cleave to him stedfastly, and trust in him confidently, and serve him with their whole heasts? One would think it impossible that they should do otherwise, if we did not know that]

The very reverse of this characterized their whole deportment—

[Their whole history from the beginning records one continued series of murmurings and rebellions. In Egypt itself, and within a few days after their passage through the Red Sea—but how shall I recite all their provocations? I must recite their whole history, if I would bring before you the full extent of their wickedness. Now and then they seemed to manifest a better spirit. When they saw all their enemies dead upon the sea shore, they began to sing praise to their Almighty Deliverer: and on some occasions, when he punished them for their rebellions, they manifested some contrition, and promised to amend[b]——— But they soon returned to their former habits, and "turned aside like a deceitful bow," which, when promising to carry the arrow to the mark, causes it to drop at your very feet[c]. At no time did they evince any real desire "to set their heart aright;" and, when they professed any such purpose, they soon forgat their engagements, and shewed, that "their spirit was not stedfast with their God".]

Now from having so complete a knowledge of them, we are ready to imagine, that they were as far beyond all others in depravity as they were in their privileges. But, that we may do justice to the character of that generation, let us proceed to consider,

II. The character of ours—

The favours conferred on us are as superior to any bestowed on them as it is possible to conceive—

[Their redemption was from oppressive task-masters; but ours is from sin and Satan, death and hell. Theirs was accomplished by power only; ours by a price surpassing all calculation, even the inestimably precious blood of God's only-begotten Son. Theirs was for a time in the earthly Canaan; ours for eternity in heaven. Theirs was a mere shadow; ours is the substance———]

What then may not reasonably be expected of us?

[Suppose we could divest ourselves of all recollection that we were a party concerned in this matter, and were called upon to give our opinion, how any people, so favoured as we have been, might

[b] ver. 34—37. [c] ver. 57.

might be expected to requite their heavenly Benefactor; what answer should we give? Should we not say, There will be no bounds to their gratitude: they will adore their God day and night: they will almost grudge a moment that is not spent in his praise: they will commit all their concerns to him with a confidence which nothing can shake; and devote themselves to him with an ardour which nothing can abate: they will be wholly his, in body, soul, and spirit; and will look for his presence and his blessing as the only portion of their souls? ———]

## And how is it with us?

[How is it *with the generality?* Do they "set their heart aright" towards him? Is there in their hearts any real determination to live *to* him, and *for* him, as their rightful Lord and Master? Is there any decided purpose to secure at all events an interest in that redemption which he has wrought out for them; and to live entirely on Him, who has lived and died for them? ——— Let me rather ask, Is there any concern about their *heart* at all? Provided only they be moral in their lives, and regular in their attendance on ordinances, do they not think themselves at liberty to set their affections on things below, instead of reserving them exclusively for things above? See, in their converse with the world, how little they savour of heaven and heavenly things! See them even in their religious worship, (whether in the closet, or the family, or the public assembly,) how cold and formal all their services are; performed from a sense of duty, rather than from inclination; and with a view to satisfy their conscience, rather than to enjoy and glorify their God! In a word, instead of pointing like the needle to the pole, their heart rests indifferently in any other position than the right; and never, unless from some forcible impulse, and for a moment, points towards God as its rest at all.]

And how is it with the greater part of *those who profess godliness?* As the former "set not their heart aright," so these "in their spirit are not stedfast with God." What lamentable instability is found in many who embrace the Gospel as a system, and number themselves amongst the Israel of God! They "name the name of Christ; but depart not from iniquity:" they "profess to know him; but in works deny him:" they "have a name to live; but are really dead:" or, if they "run well, it is only for a season;" they are soon diverted from their course; they are drawn aside by temptation; and though they "begin in the Spirit, they end in the flesh." Thus it was in the Apostle's days: and thus we are taught to expect it will be in every age, till that blessed period shall arrive, when "all nations shall serve the Lord," and "the Canaanite no more be found in the House of the Lord of Hosts." The good-ground hearers are but few, in comparison of those whose unfruitfulness or instability disappoint the

efforts of the labourer. Discontent with respect to what God has done, and distrust as to what he will do; a love of present gratifications, and a contempt of future good; a renunciation of God himself for base and worthless idols; are not evils peculiar to that generation: they exist and operate amongst ourselves with undiminished force; and in the conduct of the Israelites we have a mirror, wherein we may see our own faces, with the exception of a few who serve God in spirit and in truth. There is indeed, thanks be unto God! "a generation of righteous" persons, who are truly "upright," and truly "blessed[d]." But, for the most part, the present generation has little reason to boast against that which is mentioned in our text: yea rather, inasmuch as our privileges exceed theirs, and our obligations to holiness are greater, it may well be doubted whether we are not more criminal than they; and whether they in the day of judgment will not rise up against us and condemn us.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are satisfied with themselves—

[We are told that "there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness[e]." Yes, thousands are well satisfied with themselves on account of their outward morality, though they have no real spirituality of mind, no entire devotedness of heart to God. But let it be remembered, that "God looketh not at the outward appearance, but at the heart:" he "requireth truth in the inward parts." And to the heart must we also look: for "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." I mean not that we should take no notice of our actions; because if they be bad, our hearts must of necessity be bad also; since it is "out of the abundance of the heart that we both speak" and act. But actions, though good in appearance, will not suffice to prove our integrity before God. By the heart alone he judges: (acts are regarded only as proofs and evidences of our state:) and according as that is found upright or hypocritical before him, will our sentence at his tribunal be. Let us then look well to the truth of our profession, and to the stability of our ways. Let us see to it, that our "heart is set aright" to glorify his name, and that our spirit is stedfast with him, whatever temptations or difficulties be put in our way. For then only "have we a good hope," when we are "Israelites indeed, and without guile[e]."]

2. Those who are conscious of their departures from God—

To see that we have erred from his ways is the first step towards a return to him. If you see then a resemblance between yourselves and the Jews of old, be thankful that "God has not yet

[d] Ps. xiv. 5. & cxii. 2. [e] Prov. xxx. 12.

yet sworn in his wrath that you shall not enter into his rest." And without delay flee to the Saviour, "whose blood will cleanse you from all sin." Yet be not content to have your sins forgiven. When you pray with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean," "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," forget not to add, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" "The old heart must be taken away, and a new heart be given you," before you can enter into the kingdom of heaven. You must be born again, and become "new creatures in Christ Jesus." You must become the very reverse of what the world are, regarding God, as they regard the world; and the world, as they regard their God. When they are in holy exercises, they are quite out of their element: but when engaged in worldly pursuits or company, they are quite at home. Be ye, on the contrary, strangers in the world, and at home with God. Let your whole life and conversation testify for you, whose you are, and whom you serve: and then will God acknowledge you as his in the eternal world.]

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## CCCXCI.

### THE EXTENT OF GOD'S MERCY.

Ps. lxxviii. 34—39. *When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath: for he remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again.*

THE psalm before us is altogether historical: yet may it be called one great parable. It is, in fact, so called by the Psalmist himself: and the very words by which he designates this composition are quoted by the Evangelist as fulfilled, when our blessed Lord spake to the people in parables, and in parables exclusively[a]. The truth is, that the whole account of the redemption of Israel from Egypt, with their preservation in the wilderness, and their final establishment in the land of Canaan, is typical of man's redemption

[a] Compare ver. 2. with Matt. xiii. 35.

redemption through Christ, and of the final salvation of all God's chosen people. It is not unlike the parable of the Prodigal Son: and, unless we view it in this light, and read in it the great concerns of our own souls, we have no just conception of its true import. As a record of the most important events in the Jewish history, the writer of it might justly urge the importance of transmitting it with care, and teaching it with diligence, to all succeeding generations[b]: but, as a vehicle of spiritual instruction, it is of inestimable value, not to Jews only, but to Gentiles also, and ought to be studied with care by every child of man.

We shall not now enter into a minute illustration of this truth, because it would occupy far more of your attention than could be allotted to one discourse: but a general view of the subject will be brought before us, whilst we notice the conduct of the Israelites towards God, and his forbearance towards them, or, in other words,

I. The extent of their wickedness—

They were continually provoking God to anger—

[They were from the beginning "a rebellious and gainsaying people." Never would they pay any regard to God, till they were constrained to do so by his chastening rod. In vain were his mercies multiplied unto them: they overlooked them all, and "forgat all the wonders" of his love and mercy[c]. Dissatisfied with what he gave them for their subsistence, notwithstanding it was "angels' food," they lusted after things which were in no respect necessary for their well-being[d]. And when they had provoked God to punish them for their ungrateful murmurings, instead of being reclaimed by his chastisements, "they only sinned yet more against him[e]." When, in consequence of their obstinacy, these chastisements became more severe, and no way of deliverance was found but by their turning unto God, they pretended to return unto him; but it was a mere pretence. They called to remembrance his past interpositions in their favour, and professed to acknowledge him as their Redeemer and their God: but they only "flattered him" with titles, which excited no corresponding sentiments in their hearts, and "lied unto him" with vows, which they never intended to perform. They pretended to lay hold on "his covenant:" but they would "not be

[b] ver. 3—6. [c] ver. 11. [d] ver. 18—25. [e] ver. 17, 32.

be stedfast in it, or perform any of the engagements which it entailed upon them."]

And what is this, but a history of ourselves also?

[In our prosperity, we care not about God; "he is not in all our thoughts"———But under some heavy calamity we begin to lay to heart our former transgressions, and to inquire after God. This is common, especially in sickness, and at the expected approach of death[f]. Then we can bear to hear of God, and of Christ; yea, we apply to God as our Father, and to Christ as our Redeemer: we acknowledge with apparent gratitude all that they have done for us; and profess a dependence on them for all that we yet stand in need of———Yet in the midst of all these professions there is no true contrition, no real self-abhorrence, no fixed determination to give up ourselves unreservedly to God. We approach our God indeed, but it is "with flattery and lies[g]." We profess much love to him, and much delight in that covenant which he has made with us in Christ Jesus: but "our hearts are not right with him, neither are we stedfast in his covenant." This appears from our speedy return to vanity, as soon as ever the judgment is removed from us. We are like metal taken out of the furnace, which, however liquified, soon returns to its original hardness. Our relentings possibly have been renewed either under the ministry of the word, or by some fresh calamity: but, after all, like Pharaoh, we have only verified that humiliating description of the Apostle, "we have turned again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire."]

These rebellions however against their God only gave occasion for displaying,

II. The extent of his mercy—

Many times did he forgive them—

[Often, through the greatness of their provocations, did he lift up his hand to destroy them in the wilderness: but he forbore to execute upon them the judgments they deserved. "He remembered that they were but flesh, or as a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again;" and, if he should give vent to his indignation against them, they must inevitably, and irremediably perish.]

It is thus also that he hath dealt with us—

["How oft have we provoked him, and grieved him by our transgressions[h]!"———yet on every fresh occasion he has shewn himself "slow to anger and of great kindness." Let every one think with himself how many seasons there have been, when, in heart at least, if not in act, we have exceeded our

[f] Isai. xxvi. 16. & Hos. v. 15. [g] Hos. xi. 12. [h] ver. 40.

our usual measure of wickedness, and when he might have cut us off, so to speak, with advantage, and made us signal monuments of his displeasure — — — Yet he has borne with us, and not suffered his whole displeasure to arise. He has, thus far at least, "forgiven us;" and, in answer to the intercessions of our great High Priest, he has spared the barren fig-tree, revoking the order for its removal, and renewing, for its preservation, all the means which have hitherto been used in vain. Of this his mercy we all are living monuments: from time to time he has said concerning us, "How shall I give thee up[i]?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be[k]?" Yes, we must all bear witness for him, that the only reason of our not having been long since "consumed, is, because his compassions fail not."]

SEE then,

1. What improvement we should make of afflictive providences—

[What the Jews *professed* to do, we should do *in reality* — — — God sends afflictions for this end — — — and, if they produce this happy effect, we shall have reason to be thankful for them.]

2. What, under all circumstances, should be the chief object of our attention—

[The Jews failed, because "their heart was not right with God." Let us look to this, that we indulge not hypocrisy in our hearts. If we call God our God, and our Redeemer, let our eyes be to him as our only, and our all-sufficient Help.]

[i] Hos. xi. 7—9. [k] Jer. xiii. 27.

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## CCCXCII.

### GOD GIVING UP OBSTINATE TRANSGRESSORS.

Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. *My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up.*

THE history of the Jews is not a mere record of times and persons far distant from us, but a display of the Divine procedure towards others, as a pledge of a similar procedure towards us. The Jews were intended as examples to the Church of God in all ages: their prosperity whilst serving God, and their adversity when they had departed from him, were designed to shew us what blessings we may expect

at

at God's hands, if we serve him acceptably; and what judgments, if we rebel against him[a]. In this view it will be profitable to consider the words before us; and,

I. The perverseness complained of—

Nothing could exceed the kindness of God towards his people of old—

[How tender and affectionate is his address to them[b]! ——— He intreats them not to look to any strange god, since he alone has an exclusive right to their regard[c] ——— He assures them also, that whatsoever they shall ask at his hands, he will do it for them[d] ———

And is it not precisely in the same way that he addresses us? He invites to look to him[e], and to come unto him[f], and to ask of him whatsoever we will, with an assurance that we shall not be disappointed of our hope[g]. There is no limitation or exception, provided only the things we desire be agreeable to his holy will. If we plead with him in earnest, there is no sin that shall not be forgiven[h], no corruption that shall not be mortified[i], no want that shall not be supplied[k]. He engages, that, to whatever temptation we may be exposed, his grace shall be sufficient for us[l].]

But their obstinacy was incorrigible—

[The Jews, with but few exceptions, "would not hearken to his voice." His precepts, his promises, his threatenings, were alike disregarded by them. "They would none of him;" but said to his messengers whom he sent to reclaim them, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" ———

And is it not thus with us? Is not his authority trampled on by us? and are not both his mercies and judgments almost universally despised? We will have other objects of our affections in preference to him ——— We will not open our mouths in prayer, though we know that nothing is to be obtained without it ——— The language of our hearts and actions is, "We will not have this man to reign over us[m]" ——— Notwithstanding all that he has done to "redeem" us from death and hell, we will not take upon ourselves his light and easy yoke.]

Whilst we thus imitate the perverseness of the Jews, let us tremble for fear of,

II. The

[a] See 1 Cor. x. 1—11. & Heb. iii. 16—19. & iv. 1.
[b] ver. 8. [c] ver. 9, 10. [d] ver. 10. with Deut. iv. 7.
[e] Isai. xlv. 22. & lv. 1—3. [f] Matt. xi. 28.
[g] John xiv. 13, 14. & xv. 7. [h] Isai. i. 18.
[i] Mic. vii. 19. [k] Phil. iv. 19. [l] 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.
[m] Luke xix. 14.

II. The judgment inflicted on account of it—

Consider,

1. What a loss they sustained—

[He would have preserved them in Canaan, and loaded them with all imaginable blessings, even as he had done in former times[n] — — —

But this was a very faint shadow of what he would do for us. What victory would he have given us over all our spiritual enemies! — — — What a fulness of consolation and joy also would he have bestowed upon us, in the communications of his grace, and the manifestations of his love! Surely his Spirit, as "a Spirit of adoption," should have "witnessed with our spirits that we were his," and should have "sealed us unto the day of redemption" — — —]

2. What misery they incurred—

[God gave them up to idolatry, and to their own hearts' lusts; and left them to "walk in their own counsels[o]" — — —

And this is the curse which he denounces against us also. "His Spirit will not always strive with us." If he see that we are bent upon our evil ways, he will abandon us to our own delusions[p], and will say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone[q]" — — — A greater curse than this God cannot inflict, because our remaining days will be occupied only in augmenting our guilt and aggravating our condemnation[r] — — — Were the judgment only to deliver our bodies to *Satan* now, *that* might lead to our final *salvation*: but to give us over to the uncontrolled influence of *self*, is a certain prelude to our everlasting *damnation*. It is, in fact, the very beginning of hell, where it will be said to the unhappy souls, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is unjust, let him be unjust still[s]."]

Hence it appears,

1. Whose will be the fault, if any be lost—

[None can lay it to the charge of God that he is unwilling to save them. He has sworn with an oath that he willeth not the death of any sinner[t]. And in the psalm before us he takes up a lamentation over those who obstinately compel him to give them up[u]. Thus did our blessed Lord over the murderous Jerusalem[x]: and thus does he over all impenitent transgressors; "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life[y]." "Often would

[n] Deut. xxxii. 29.
[o] See Rom. i. 24, 26, 28. "So I gave them up."
[p] 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. [q] Hos. iv. 17. [r] Rom. ii. 5.
[s] Rev. xxii. 11. [t] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. 1 Tim. ii. 4.
[u] ver. 13. [x] Luke xix. 40, 41.
[y] John v. 40.

would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not[z]." And what a bitter source of self-condemnation will this be to us, that God would have saved us, but we would not be saved by him! The language which God *now* uses over us, we shall *then* use in reference to ourselves: "O that I had hearkened to his voice! O that I had walked in his ways!" How should I have been at this instant triumphing over my cruel adversary, and feasting on all the richest fruits of paradise, instead of dwelling with everlasting burnings, without one drop of water to cool my tongue! Surely this reflection will be the bitterest ingredient in that bitter cup, which they who perish will be drinking of to all eternity.]

2. Whose will be the glory, if any be saved—

[We never come to Christ, till the Father, by the mighty working of his power, draws us to him. Such is the pride of the human heart, that no man will submit to be saved by grace alone, till God has made him "willing in the day of his power." If therefore we have been brought to hearken to his voice, let us remember Who it is that has unstopped our ears.

If it be said, We prayed for these blessings; and therefore we at least may glory that the blessings do not come to us unsolicited; we would ask, Who inclined or enabled us to pray? We should never have been inclined to pray, if God had not given us a spirit of grace and of supplication; "nor should we have known what to pray for as we ought, if He by his Spirit had not helped our infirmities." If still it be said, "Yet we prayed;" Be it so: but how long were you before you prayed at all? And what have been your prayers since ever you began to pray? Are you not amazed when you review your prayers, and see, how cold, and dead, and formal they have been? What if a beggar had asked of you in the way that you have but too often asked of God? Would you have granted his request? or, if you had granted his request, and not only relieved his present necessities, but conferred upon him one half of your fortune, would you not be surprised, if he, instead of admiring your unequalled generosity, were taking credit to himself for asking relief from you? Know then, that if you are partaking of God's mercy, you are no other than "beggars, who have been taken from the dunghill, and set among the princes." Know, that ye are altogether debtors to the grace of God, and must ascribe to him "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever."]

[z] Matt. xxiii. 37.

## CCCXCIII.

### THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD RECONCILED IN CHRIST JESUS.

Ps. lxxxv. 9, 10. *Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

WE are told in Scripture, that "the prayer of the upright is God's delight:" and in instances without number has he evinced the truth of this saying. If only we wait upon him with humility, and listen to his voice, "he will speak peace unto us[a]." The writer of this psalm, which was most probably composed after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, records for our instruction, that he sought not the Lord in vain. The people, though restored, found many difficulties to encounter: and the Psalmist earnestly intreated God to perfect for them what he had begun, and to establish the nation in righteousness and peace[b]. In answer to this prayer, God assured him, not only that the blessings which had been solicited should be conferred, but that the more glorious redemption, which was shadowed forth by those events, should in due time be accomplished. In this sense of the passage, all the best interpreters concur: and it perfectly accords with the general language of the Prophets, which, in addition to the literal meaning, has also a spiritual or mystical sense; and which, under images apparently relating only to one peculiar people, has respect to Christ and his Church to the end of time. Taking the words then in a prophetical sense, we may notice in them,

I. The obstacles on God's part to the salvation of man—

When man fell, the "truth and righteousness" of God required that the penalties of his transgression should be executed upon him—

[To

[a] ver. 8. [b] ver. 1—7.

[To man in Paradise, God gave liberty to eat of every tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: but in reference to that tree he said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This death comprehended not merely the dissolution of the body; but the destruction also of the soul, even that everlasting destruction from which the second Adam has delivered us: according as it is written, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is *eternal* life through Jesus Christ our Lord[c]." From the moment therefore of his transgression, man became obnoxious to this punishment; and the truth of God was pledged to inflict it. Moreover, God as a righteous Governor could not but maintain the honour of his law. His justice was engaged not to suffer the violations of that law to pass unpunished.]

This presented an apparently insurmountable obstacle to man's salvation—

[To say that God could not have found some other means of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness, would be presumptuous, because the resources of his wisdom are infinite: but we are perfectly justified in saying, that he could not save man unless some way of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness were found. However God might desire to exercise mercy, and to be at peace with man, he could not do it at the expense of any other of his perfections. St. Paul himself frequently assigns this limit to the Divine procedure: "God cannot lie," says he: and again, "It is impossible for God to lie:" and again, "God cannot deny himself." Again he says, "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." It is plain therefore, that unless a way could be found for "mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other," no hope could be entertained for fallen man: the judgments denounced against him must be executed; and, having partaken with the fallen angels in their guilt, he must partake with them also in their misery.]

But, formidable as these obstacles were, we behold in our text,

II. The way in which they are removed—

All has been done for man that was required of man—

[A substitute has been provided for our guilty race. The Son of God himself has come down from heaven, and been made under the law, that, in the very nature that had sinned, he might bear the penalty of sin, and fulfil the utmost possible demands of that law which we had broken. True it is, that the law

[c] Rom. v. 12—19. & vi. 23.

law denounced eternal death; and that Christ bore that penalty only for a season: but then it must be remembered, that he was God, as well as man: and from his godhead is derived a virtue on all that he did or suffered, a virtue which is fully adequate to the obedience or sufferings of the whole world. Indeed the law gains more honour by the sufferings of our incarnate God, than it ever could have done from the sufferings of the whole human race: for, if man had undertaken to pay the penalty, no time could ever have arrived, when it might be said, "Now Divine justice is satisfied, and the law has received a full compensation for the dishonour done to it:" but in the sufferings of God's co-equal Son there is "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." In his obedience also to the law there is an honour done to it far beyond all that could have accrued to it from the obedience of man. That God himself should become subject to his own law, and fulfil in his own person all that is required of his creatures, is such an exalted honour to the law, that it may well be regarded as a sufficient substitute for the obedience of man, and as an adequate ground for the justification of all who shall trust in it[cc].]

Thus a way is opened for man's salvation, in perfect consistency with every perfection of the Deity—

["Truth and righteousness" are now completely satisfied. They demanded a perfect fulfilment of the law; and the law has been perfectly fulfilled: they demanded the penalty of death to be inflicted on account of sin; and it has been inflicted on the sinner's substitute. Now as a debt, discharged by a surety, can no longer be demanded of the principal, so can our debt be no longer demanded of us, if we plead what Christ has done and suffered for us. And, as a thing purchased for any person, belongs to him for whom it was purchased, so we, who have all the glory of heaven purchased for us by our adorable Emmanuel, have a right to it, if we plead the purchase he has made. Hence it appears, that truth and righteousness are no longer against us, but are rather on our side; and, instead of demanding, as before, the destruction of our souls, are become advocates for our free and full salvation. Justice now says, Pay them, O God, what their Redeemer has purchased for them: and Truth says, Fulfil to them, O Lord, all that thou hast promised to those who believe in Jesus.]

But let us more particularly consider,

III. The blessed consequences of the removal of them—

[Salvation

[cc] Isai. xlii. 21.

[Salvation is now accessible to all: it is come both to Jews and Gentiles: "It is near unto us." To those especially "who fear the Lord," it is near, even "in their mouth and in their heart[d]." No longer does the fiery sword prohibit our access to the tree of life. "Mercy" has now full scope for the freest exercise. God can now be "a just God, and yet a Saviour[e]." He "declares his righteousness," no less than his mercy, "in the forgiveness of sins; and is just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Christ[f]." Hence he proclaims "peace" to all that are afar off[g]. He establishes his tabernacle in the midst of us: and invites all to come unto him, even to his mercy-seat, in full assurance of faith. "In every corner of the land his glory dwells[h]:" and all who truly fear him may have daily "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." *The manner in which this assertion is made*, deserves particular attention: "*Surely* his salvation is nigh them that fear him." This blessed truth admits not of the smallest doubt: it may be fully and firmly depended upon. A spring of great elastic force does not more certainly rise up when the superincumbent pressure is withdrawn from it, than mercy issues from the bosom of our God now that the obstacles to its exercise are removed.]

BEHOLD then how replete this passage is with,

1. Instruction to the ignorant—

[Men differ much about the way of salvation: but this passage clearly determines who is right. That plan of salvation, and that alone, is right, which is carried into effect in perfect consistency with all the attributes of God. But there is no way that provides for the honour of God's truth and righteousness, but that which is revealed in the Gospel, the way of salvation by faith in Christ. Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death ever did, or ever could, answer the demands of law and justice: nothing but Christ's completion of that work in the quality of our Surety could enable the sinner to say to the supreme Governor of the universe, "Avert thy wrath from me; for I have already endured it in my Surety; and give me everlasting glory, for I, in the person of my Surety, have fulfilled all righteousness, and perfectly obeyed thy law." But the Believer may adopt this language; since God himself has said, that "Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him." Let the uninstructed bear this in mind, and "determine to know nothing" as a ground of hope towards God, "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."]

2. Terror to the presumptuous—

[It is surprising what a measure of confidence some will express,

[d] Rom. x. 8, 9. [e] Isai. xlv. 21. [f] Rom. iii. 25, 26.
[g] Eph. ii. 17. [h] Isai. iv. 5.

express, notwithstanding neither their principles nor their conduct at all accord with the Scriptures of Truth. But we must declare to all, that both in the foundation of our hope, and in the superstructure built upon it, "Mercy and truth must meet together, and righteousness and peace must kiss each other." We have before shewn, that no one perfection of the Deity will display itself at the expense of another; all must unite and harmonize in every work of his: it is as impossible for God in any one instance to violate his righteousness or truth, as for him to cease from his existence. In us also must those graces which correspond with his perfections be found in united and harmonious exercise: we must be just and true, and merciful and kind: yea, it is by our conformity to the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness, that we must judge of our state before him: for, however accurate our views of his Gospel may be, it is a certain truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" "Truth must spring out of the earth, if ever righteousness shall look down from heaven[i]."]

3. Consolation to the timid—

[It is frequently amongst those who truly "fear God" a matter of doubt and anxiety, whether God *can* pardon them: they see their manifold imperfections in so strong a light, that God appears to them bound, as it were, in justice, to banish them from his presence, yea, and bound in truth also to execute his threatenings upon them. But let such persons view God, not as he is in himself, but as he is in Christ Jesus. There it is that he must be seen as a God of love and peace. There it is that the drooping penitent may behold him "as a reconciled God, who will never impute to him his trespasses[k]." Yes, in Christ Jesus, "God is not only merciful and kind, but faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness[l]." Dismiss then your fears, ye trembling saints; and put your trust in Him, who has in so wonderful a way removed all the obstacles to your salvation. The veil of the temple was rent in twain on purpose to shew you, that henceforth there is free access to God for every sinner upon earth, and that all who approach him in that new and living way, by faith in Christ Jesus, shall surely find acceptance with him. If God will be just in punishing the ungodly, he will be no less just to his Son in pardoning all who plead the merit of his blood: and if he will be true in executing his threatenings, he will be no less true in fulfilling his exceeding great and precious promises. Only rely on them, and plead them at a throne of grace, and you shall never, never be disappointed of your hope.]

[i] ver. 11. with Isai. xlv. 8. [k] 2 Cor. v. 19, 20. [l] 1 John i. 9.

## CCCXCIV.

### A PRAYING SPIRIT EXEMPLIFIED.

Ps. lxxxvi. 1—5. *Bow down thine ear, O Lord! hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am holy. O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee! Be merciful unto me, O Lord! for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*

TRUE and genuine piety cannot always be certainly known by men's intercourse with their fellow-creatures. Appearances may be so plausible, that they cannot, except by Him who searcheth the heart, be distinguished from realities. But in their intercourse with the Deity, the truth or falsehood of their profession may be clearly discerned. The most refined hypocrite may, by examining the state of his soul in his private devotions, obtain the certain means of discovering his proper character, provided he have his standard rightly fixed, and his test impartially applied. To furnish such a standard, is our object in the present discourse. We here behold the man after God's own heart drawing nigh to a throne of grace, and pouring out his soul in supplications before God: and we wish to call your attention especially to the spirit which he manifested in this sacred duty, since it will serve as an excellent criterion whereby to try and judge ourselves.

Let us then consider,

I. The subject-matter of his prayer—

It should seem that David was now under great affliction, either from the persecutions of Saul, or from the unnatural rebellion of his son Absalom: and his prayers may well be understood, in the first instance, as relating to his temporal trials. But, as it is of his soul that he chiefly speaks, we shall notice his prayer principally in that view. Let us notice then,

1. His petitions—

[St. Paul, in both his Epistles to Timothy, prays, that "grace, and mercy, and peace" might be multiplied upon him. These three terms comprehend the substance of the Psalmist's petitions. He desired "grace," to "preserve and save his soul." He desired "mercy;" "Be merciful unto me, O Lord!" And he desired "peace;" "Rejoice the soul of thy servant, O Lord!" Now these are such petitions as every sinner in the universe should offer. There are no other that can be compared with them, in point of importance to the souls of men. As for all the objects of time and sense, they sink into perfect insignificance before the things which appertain to our everlasting salvation. To all therefore I would say, Seek what David sought. Cry mightily to God to have mercy upon you, and to preserve and save your soul: and when you have done that, you may fitly pray also for that consolation and joy, which a sense of his pardoning love will produce in the soul.]

2. His pleas—

[These are taken, partly, *from what he experienced in his own soul*; and, partly, *from the character of God himself*.

Observe how he urges, *what he experienced in his own soul*. The things which God himself requires from us, in order to the acceptance of our prayers, are, *a deep sense of our necessities, an entire surrender of our souls to him, a reliance on him for all needful blessings, and a continual application to him in a way of fervent and believing prayer*. Behold, these are the very things which David at this time experienced, and which therefore he pleaded before God as evidences of the sincerity of his prayers: "Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me: *for I am poor and needy!*" And who is there that must not adopt the same acknowledgment? Who that considers, how destitute his soul is of all that is truly good, will not find these words exactly descriptive of his state? Again, the Psalmist prays, "Preserve my soul; for *I am holy*." We must not imagine that David here meant to boast of his high attainments in holiness: the term "holy" is applied in Scripture to every thing that is dedicated to God, though from its very nature it cannot possess any inherent sanctity: the temple of God, the vessels of the sanctuary, and all the offerings, were holy, because they were *set apart for God*. So David here speaks of himself as "set apart for God[a]:" and his expression is exactly equivalent to that which he uses in another place; "I am THINE; save me[b]." This then is another plea which it becomes us all to use. As the Israelites were "a *holy* nation[c]," so are we[d]: and if we have given up ourselves unreservedly to God, we may well hope, that he will hear and answer our petitions. Once more David says, "Save me;

[a] See Ps. iv. 3. [b] Ps. cxix. 94.
[c] Exod. xix. 6. [d] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

me; for *I trust in Thee.*" This also was a most acceptable plea. If we ask with a wavering and doubtful mind, we can never succeed[e]: but the prayer of faith must of necessity prevail[f]. The suppliant who truly and habitually trusts in God, can never be disappointed. Lastly, David says, "*I cry unto thee daily:*" "*Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*" God "will be inquired of, to do for us the things that he has promised." "If we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us[g]:" but, if we ask not, we shall not, we cannot, have[h].

But David's chief plea is taken *from the character of God himself:* and this is, in reality, the most satisfactory to the human mind, and most acceptable to the Divine Majesty, who "will work for his own great Name's sake," when all other grounds of hope are subverted and lost. Towards his creatures generally, whether rational or irrational, God is "good;" but towards the children of men he is "ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon him." No mother is so tender towards her new-born child, as God is towards his penitent and believing people. He is far more "ready to forgive," than they are to ask forgiveness; and will multiply his pardons beyond all the multitude of their offences[i]. "Where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound[k]." The freeness and fulness of God's grace should be clearly seen, and confidently relied upon: but then we must never forget, that this glorious perfection shines only in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ only that God can pardon sinners in consistency with his justice: but in Christ, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness[l]." In Christ therefore, and in God as reconciled to us through the blood of his Son, must be all our hope. If we rest solely on Christ's obedience unto death, all will be well; for "in him all the promises of God are Yea, and Amen[m]." But, if we look at God in any way but as in the person of Christ, we shall surely find him "a consuming fire[n]."]

The prayer itself not calling for any further elucidation, we proceed to notice,

II. The spirit manifested in it—

Here the subject is peculiarly important, because it exhibits in so striking a view the dispositions of mind which we should invariably exercise in our approaches to the Divine Majesty. In this example of David, then observe,

1. His

[e] Jam. i. 6, 7.
[f] Matt. xxi. 22. Mark xi. 24.
[g] Matt. vii. 7, 8.
[h] Jam. iv. 2.
[i] Isai. lv. 7—9.
[k] Rom. v. 20.
[l] Rom. iii. 24, 25.
[m] 2 Cor. i. 20.
[n] Heb. xii. 29.

1. His meekness and modesty—

[He approaches God, as a sinner ought to do, with reverential awe. He exhibits none of that unhallowed boldness, and indecent familiarity, which are so commonly to be noticed in the prayers of many at this day. It is much to be lamented that many address God almost as if he were an equal. We speak not now of that irreverence with which people, altogether ignorant of religion, conduct themselves in the public services of the church; (though that is deeply to be deplored;) but of the state of mind manifested by many religious people, Ministers, as well as others, in their public and social addresses to the throne of Heaven. How different, alas! is it from that which is inculcated, both in the Scriptures[nn], and in the Liturgy of our Church! In the Liturgy, the people are exhorted to "accompany their Minister with a pure heart and humble voice to the throne of the heavenly Grace:" and, in another place, "to make their humble confession to Almighty God, *meekly kneeling* on their knees." This is a lovely state of mind, and as opposite to that which many religious people manifest, as light to darkness. Many whose religious principles differ widely from the self-applauding Pharisee, resemble him very nearly in his spirit and conduct: but let us, on the contrary, imitate the publican, who, "not venturing so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, smote upon his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner."]

2. His humility and contrition—

[He felt himself a guilty and undone creature, deserving of God's everlasting displeasure: and hence he cried so repeatedly for mercy and salvation. And here again we see how the same views and dispositions are inculcated in the services of our Church. Let any one peruse the confession which is daily offered——— or that which we are taught to utter at the table of the Lord——— or let him read the responses after every one of the Ten Commandments——— or the repeated cries, "Lord, have mercy upon me! Christ, have mercy upon me! Lord, have mercy upon me!" and he will see at once, what a beautiful harmony there is between our Liturgy and the holy Scriptures; and what distinguished saints all her members would be, if the spirit of her Liturgy were transfused into their minds. This is the state of mind which above all we would recommend to those who desire to find acceptance with God: for "to this man will God look, even to him who is of a broken and contrite spirit[o];" this is the sacrifice which, above all, God requires, and which he has assured us "he will never despise[p]."]

3. His faith and love—

[David

[nn] Eccl. v. 2. with Ps. lxxxix. 7.
[o] Isai. lvii. 15. & lxv. 2.
[p] Ps. li. 17.

[David did not so view his own sinfulness as to distrust the mercy of his heavenly Father; but rather took occasion from his own sinfulness to magnify the more the free and super-abounding grace of God. In this, his example is especially to be followed. Nothing can warrant us to limit the mercy of our God. O how "ready is he to forgive" returning penitents! Of this, the conduct of the father towards the repenting prodigal is a lively and instructive image. In that parable, the compassion of God towards returning sinners is, as it were, exhibited even to the eye of sense. Let us then, whatever be our state, bear this in mind, that unbelief is a sin which binds all our other sins upon us. Never, under any circumstances, should we harbour it for a moment. It is enough to have resisted God's authority, without proceeding further to rob God of the brightest jewels of his crown—his grace and mercy. The goodness of God, as described in our text, and in another subsequent part of this psalm [q],——— is a sufficient pledge to us, that of those who come to him in his Son's name, he never did, nor ever will, cast out so much as one.]

4. His zeal and earnestness—

[The diversified petitions and pleas which we have already considered, shew, how determined David was not to rest, till he had obtained favour of the Lord. And thus must we also "continue instant in prayer:" we must "watch unto it with all perseverance;" we must "pray always, and not faint." Alas! how are we condemned in our own minds for our manifold neglects, and for our lukewarmness in prayer to God! But we must not rest satisfied with confessing these neglects: we should remedy them, and break through this supineness, and correct this negligence, and lie at Bethesda's pool till the angel come for our relief. This is suggested to us in our text. What we translate, "I cry unto thee *daily*," is, in the margin, "I cry unto thee *all the day*." O that there were in us such a heart! O that our sense of need were so deep, our desire of mercy so ardent, and our faith in God so assured, that we were drawn to God with an irresistible and abiding impulse; and that, like Jacob of old, we "wrestled with him day and night, saying, I will not let thee go until thou bless me [r]." Such prayer could not but prevail; and such a suppliant could not but find everlasting acceptance with God [s].]

[q] ver. 15. [r] Gen. xxxii. 24, 26, 28. with Hos. xii. 3—5.
[s] Luke xviii. 1—8.

## CCCXCV.

### THE GLORY OF ZION.

Ps. lxxxvii. 3. *Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.*

THE city here spoken of, is Zion; of whose praises the whole Scriptures speak. She is represented as "beautiful for situation, and as being the joy of the whole earth[a]." Even God himself is represented as delighting in her, and as "loving the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob[b]." Why she, and the Church which is represented by her, are so high in the estimation of God and man, it will be not unimportant to consider.

To bring the subject fully before you, I will shew,

I. What glorious things are spoken of her—

Amongst the many things spoken of her in Scripture, she is particularly commended,

1. As the residence of the Deity—

[God chose Zion of old for his habitation, and delighted to make that above all other cities in the universe "the place of his rest[c]." There he abode in that bright symbol of his presence, the Shechinah, "dwelling between the cherubims[d]." There his people assembled by his appointment to worship him: thence he dispensed his blessings: and thence in due time he sent forth his everlasting Gospel[e].

Thus under the Christian dispensation he has honoured his Church, dwelling in it; as he has said, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." There he reveals his glory, even "all the glory of the godhead, in the face of Jesus Christ"——There he makes known all the riches of his grace and love——There he communes with his people who present their supplications before him, "drawing nigh to them, whilst they draw nigh to him;" and giving them answers of peace; not indeed *visibly*, as by the Urim and Thummim of old, but *really*, and satisfactorily to their souls——In a word, though unknown in any other place under heaven, "He is known in her palaces as a Refuge[f]."]

2. As the birth-place of the saints—

[This is particularly noticed in the psalm before us: "Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her[g]." Under

[a] Ps. xlviii. 2. [b] ver. 2. [c] Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14. [d] Ps. lxxx. 1.
[e] Isai. ii. 3. [f] Ps. xlviii. 3. [g] ver. 5, 6.

Under the Jewish dispensation conversions were comparatively few: but under the Christian dispensation they are very numerous; though at present they are only as the drop before the shower. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out in richer abundance, and thousands were converted in a day: and still, wherever the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth, there the power of God accompanies the word, and "subdues the souls of men to the obedience of faith." Amongst the heathen, Satan maintains an universal sway: and amongst those Christians who are not blessed with a faithful Ministry, very few are ever rescued from his dominion: but where the cross of Christ is exalted, there will be found "a stir among the dry bones," and multitudes are born to God. And may we not ask, Whether this is not confirmed by the experience of many here present? Once you were as dead in trespasses and sins, and as destitute of all desire after God, as any people in the world: but, through the preaching of a crucified Saviour in this place, your souls have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Here also, when you have been mourning on account of your in-dwelling corruptions, God has "given you the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness[h];" so that you can confidently say, "I was born there." Blessed testimony, that may well endear to you the gates of Zion, and render her more lovely in your eyes than all the palaces in the universe!]

3. As an emblem of heaven itself—

[Such it really is: for all who are born in her "are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem[i]." Though she is a spiritual edifice, she has her foundations, her walls, her gates; all of which are found also in that heavenly Zion which St. John saw, even in "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, and having the glory of God[j]." And both the one city and the other "are of pure gold[k]." Each of them too, amongst the many distinctions which they enjoy above all earthly cities, have a light peculiar to themselves. Of our Zion it is said, "The sun is no more her light by day, neither for brightness does the moon give light unto her; but the Lord is unto her an everlasting light, and her God her glory[l]." And thus it is also in the heavenly Zion: "The city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God does lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereof[m]." It is but one family that is inhabiting both the one city and the other, "even the family of our Lord Jesus Christ[n];" and their employments are altogether the same: for

[h] Isai. lxi. 3. [i] Heb. xii. 22. [j] Rev. xxi. 10, 11, 14, 21.
[k] Rev. xxi. 18. [l] Isai. lx. 19. [m] Rev. xxi. 23.
[n] Eph. iii. 14, 15.

for whilst the one are "rejoicing in the Lord always" here below[o], the other are incessantly engaged in singing praises to him above, even "to Him, who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto their God; to him, I say, do they ascribe all glory and dominion for ever and ever[p]."]

II. The effect which these testimonies should have upon us—

Surely, when the Church is so high in the estimation of God,

1. We should inquire what place she holds in our esteem—

[Never has she had, at least in a spiritual view, any visible glory. In the days of the Prophets, her limits were contracted, and her members poor, despised, persecuted. In the days of Christ and his Apostles, though her limits were enlarged, she, like her Lord himself, had "no beauty nor comeliness for which she was to be desired[q]." She has been in a wilderness state even to this present hour[r], an object of hatred and derision to all that were round about her. Yet to the eye of faith she is most beautiful, most glorious. In all that pertains to her, she is "the perfection of beauty[s]." Her foundations are of the most precious stones: "her walls are salvation, and her gates praise[t]." Her laws are all holy, and just, and good: her ordinances are a very heaven upon earth: and her members more highly privileged than all other creatures in the universe. Say then, Brethren, whether such be your views of Zion; and whether to be enrolled amongst her citizens be the highest object of your ambition? Our blessed Lord told his Disciples, that even to have "the devils made subject unto them" was no ground of joy in comparison of this[u]: for, if you really belong to Zion, "your names are written in heaven," and all the glory and felicity of heaven are yours. But if you are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, you are strangers from the covenants of promise, without God, without Christ, without hope[x]."]

2. We should seek to advance her glory—

[God has promised, that, in due season, "the mountain of the Lord's House shall be established on the top of the mountains, and that all nations shall flow unto her[y]." "Then shall Zion be no more termed desolate, or forsaken: for God will delight in her; and all the kings of the earth shall bring their glory to her." "Her gates shall be open continually: they shall not be shut

[o] Phil. iv. 4. [p] Rev. i. 5, 6. [q] Isai. liii. 2. [r] Rev. xii. 6.
[s] Ps. l. 2. [t] Isai. lx. 18. [u] Luke x. 20. [x] Eph. ii. 12.
[y] Isai. ii. 2.

shut day nor night; that men may bring unto her the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. Then the nation and kingdom which shall not serve her shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto her, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, (the meanest slave being as acceptable as the mightiest monarch), to beautify the place of God's sanctuary, and to make the place of his feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted her, shall come bending unto her; and all that despised her shall bow down themselves at the soles of her feet; and shall call her, The city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel[z]." Now then I ask, Should we not long for this glorious period? Should we not exert ourselves to the uttermost to help it forward? Should we not search out the benighted Gentiles, and labour to bring back to their God the dispersed of Israel? Should we not endeavour to bring men from every quarter, "their sons in our arms, and their daughters in litters upon our shoulders, to glorify the House of his glory?" Men may pretend to love the Church: but their professions must be brought to this test. If we are at all sensible of the benefit of belonging to Zion, we shall neither rest ourselves, "nor give any rest to our God," till "the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth[a]."]

3. We should labour to participate in all her privileges—

[Is God indeed revealed there in all his excellency and glory? Is it the place, the only place, where sinners are born to God? Is it an emblem even of heaven itself? We should determine then to come to her without delay, and to seek admission into her blissful community. In comparison of being numbered amongst her children, all that the world can give should be esteemed by us as dung and dross; and we should say with David, "I would rather be a door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness[b]." As for hatred, contempt, persecution, or even death itself, they should be accounted rather as an honour, and a happiness, and a privilege, than as objects of fear, if they are brought upon us for Zion's sake. It should be a sufficient recompence to us, that our God is glorified, and that the interests of Zion are advanced[c]. If we are children of Zion indeed, we shall be joyful under any circumstances; we shall "be joyful, I say, in our King[d]:" as it is written; "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd; (that is, for all spiritual consolation and support;) and

[z] Isai. lx. 11—14. [a] Isai. lxii. 1, 6, 7. [b] Ps. lxxxiv. 10.
[c] 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14. [d] Ps. cxlix. 2.

and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all[e]." Whether they be priests or people, it shall be thus with them: for, "I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord[f]."]

APPLICATION—

[Let us then love Zion, and "prefer her before our chief joy[g]." Let her ordinances be our delight[h]; and let us pray for her advancement, saying, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within her palaces." Then shall our own souls most assuredly flourish: for "they shall prosper that love her[i]."]

[e] Jer. xxxi. 12. [f] ib. ver. 14. [g] Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.
[h] Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 7. [i] Ps. cxxii. 6, 7.

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## CCCXCVI.

### DISTRESS OF SOUL CONSIDERED.

Ps. lxxxviii. 14—16. *Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die, from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.*

HEMAN the Ezrahite, the author of this psalm, is thought by most to have been the grandson of Judah[a]; and to have been so eminent for wisdom, as almost to have equalled Solomon himself[b]. But he seems rather to have been the grandson of Shemuel, or Samuel[bb]. Whoever he was, he was a man greatly afflicted, and, at the time that he wrote this psalm, altogether destitute of any other consolation, than what he felt in spreading his sorrows before God. In other psalms we find many and grievous complaints; but the gloom that overspreads the mind of the author at the commencement of them, is usually dispelled before they are brought to a close; and what began with sorrow is terminated with joy. But in the composition before us there is no such pleasing change: it is nothing but one continued

[a] 1 Chron. ii. 6. [b] 1 Kin. iv. 31.
[bb] 1 Chron. vi. 33. & xv. 19. compared with the title to Ps. lxxxix. The grandson of Judah could not have written so about David.

tinued complaint from beginning to end. In discoursing on it, we shall point out,

I. The state to which a righteous soul may be reduced—

Truly the state of Heman was most afflictive—

[There can be no doubt but that he was a righteous man. Had he not been so, he would not have addressed Jehovah in such expressions of holy confidence, as "The Lord God of his salvation;" nor could he have affirmed, that "night and day he had poured out his prayers and cries before him[c]." Yet behold, how heavy, how exceeding heavy was his affliction! "His soul was so full of troubles, that they brought him nigh to the grave[d]." Hear how he himself represents them, referring them all at the same time to God himself as the author of them: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves[e]." To the same effect he speaks also in the words of our text, complaining of the dereliction he experienced in this hour of his calamity, and of the terrors which he endured, which, whilst they were rapidly bringing down his body to the grave, had well nigh bereaved him of his senses, and reduced him to a state of utter distraction.]

And such, alas! is the state of many in every age of the Church—

[Some there are of a low, nervous, hypochondriac temperament both of mind and body, and who, whether they were religious or not, would of necessity be of a melancholy disposition; that being their constitutional tendency, just as cheerfulness or confidence are the tendencies of others. Persons of this class view every thing in a dark unfavourable light: they forebode nothing but evil: and, if religion occupies their minds, they write bitter things against themselves, and conclude that they never can be saved. They love gloomy thoughts, and brood over them day and night; and greatly injure both their minds and bodies by ruminating on subjects that are too deep for them. They perplex themselves about the Divine decrees, and thus give occasion to many to represent religion as distracting their minds: but the truth is, that they seek for nothing but poison: they have no appetite for wholesome food: and that religion is no more answerable for their distraction, than a fertilizing stream is for the death of a maniac who drowns himself in it.

Some there are who are brought into this state by long and complicated troubles. The mind of man, unless supported in a miraculous way, cannot endure a pressure beyond certain limits. Ever

[c] ver. 1, 2, 9, 13. [d] ver. 3. [e] ver. 6, 7.

Even Job himself, notwithstanding his extraordinary patience, seemed at times to sink under the accumulated load of his afflictions, and to be transported beyond the bounds of sense or reason. And the dejection of many, however it appear to originate in matters connected with religion, must in reality be traced to this source: their mind is enfeebled by a complication of bodily diseases, and of worldly sorrows, and then becomes an easy prey to any discouragements which may engross its attention.

Some are broken down by means of some great transgression, which, either before, or after, their religious course, they have committed, and which has destroyed all hope of respect from man, or comfort in their own minds. To such, life is become a burthen: they cannot bear even the sight of those whose esteem they have forfeited: they affect solitude, which yet is irksome to them; and they long for death, as a relief from the torments of a self-condemning conscience. It is no wonder if such, though truly penitent before God, yield to desponding fears, and anticipate nothing but misery in the eternal world.

Some are in a more extraordinary degree than others exposed to the assaults of Satan. That powerful adversary seems, as it were, to take possession of their minds, as formerly he possessed the bodies of men: and by his fiery darts he inflicts the deadliest wounds upon their souls. He is well called, "The accuser of the Brethren;" for he accuses them to God, as he did Job of old; and accuses them also at the bar of their own consciences, to prove them hypocrites and self-deceivers. Is it to be wondered at, if that roaring lion prevail over a weak and unprotected sheep? The wonder rather is, that any are enabled to withstand him.

But once more: there are some who by God himself are brought into manifold temptations, and are suffered to experience much darkness in their souls. And though at first sight it should seem as if these persons were less beloved of the Lord than others, the truth is, that they are often to be found amongst those who are his chief favourites: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth;" and usually, those most, who are most beloved. We cannot doubt but that Job was an object of God's peculiar favour: yet who was ever more afflicted than he, even in the very way that we are now speaking of? Hear his own words: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me[f]." And need we say how deeply our blessed Lord himself was afflicted, when "his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and his mind was so distracted, that "he knew not what to say[g]?"

That God sends these dispensations to his people in love, will appear

[f] Job vi. 4. [g] John xii. 27.

appear even from our text: for Heman, who was eminent for his piety, declares, that he had been so "afflicted from his youth up." And where did he attain this extraordinary piety, but in the school of affliction? Whilst others were intent on pleasure, he, by his troubles was led to study his own heart, and to seek an acquaintance with his God; and thus he gained a knowledge which well repaid him for all that he endured. And it is a well-known fact, that those who are most exercised with spiritual troubles, are usually best instructed in "the deep things of God."

It is evident, then, that pious souls *may* be reduced to great distress, and that, in fact, many in every age *are* really so reduced; some through *constitutional infirmity*; some by means of *accumulated afflictions*; and some by an irretrievable loss of character consequent on some *heinous transgression*: some are brought into it by the *assaults of Satan*, and some by the wise and gracious *appointment of* their *God*.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The reflections which naturally arise from the subject—

And,

1. How great is the evil and bitterness of sin—

[If there had been no sin, there would have been no sorrow. Sorrow is the fruit of sin; the fruit which immediately sprang up, as soon as this root of bitterness was planted in the human breast. Till Adam fell, he enjoyed the sweetest intercourse with his Creator: but, after his transgression, instead of going forth as before to meet his God, he fled from his face, and strove to hide himself. From that moment has the whole world become a "Bochim," a land of weeping and of mourning[h]. Sorrow is that inheritance to which every child of man is born: and, even if any be truly converted unto God, still, as long as they continue in this vale of tears, they will, at a greater or smaller distance, be followed by two inseparable attendants, "sorrow and sighing:" and it is only when they shall arrive at the portals of heaven, that joy and gladness will be their sole companions: then indeed, but never till then, will that Scripture be fulfilled, "They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away[i]." How fearfully the minds even of good men may be oppressed, by a sense of God's displeasure against sin, will appear from the experience of David; who "ate ashes like bread, and mingled his drink with weeping, because of God's indignation and wrath[k]." And it yet more forcibly appears from the complaints of Job: "Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest

[h] Judg. ii. 4, 5. [i] Isai. xxxv. 10.
[k] See Ps. xxxviii. 1, 2. & cii. 9, 10.

rifiest me through visions; so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than life[k]." If we look to the terrifying effects of sin on the ungodly, the sad history of Judas paints them in their true colours. Let these sorrows then, in whomsoever they be found, be traced to their proper source; and let this at least be learned from them, that "it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord."]

2. What obligations to God do they lie under, who are favoured with any measure of peace and joy!

[This point, we apprehend, is by no means duly considered. It is thought by many to be a hard thing if there be any intermission of their spiritual comfort: but the wonder rather is, that there is any intermission of their sorrow. Who that considers the desert of sin, who that views the imperfection of his best services, has not reason to adore and magnify his God, for the willingness he shews to revive the hearts of the contrite? Were God extreme to mark what is done amiss, the experience in our text would be the lot of all without exception, even of those who should find grace in the eternal world. But, blessed be God! this is far from being the case: there are many to whom God vouchsafes the light of his countenance, and the joys of his salvation. We desire, however, that such persons should appreciate aright the blessings conferred upon them: and that, instead of ever complaining of darkness or of trouble, they should improve every manifestation of God's love to the furtherance of their confidence in him, and of their zeal in his service.]

3. How astonishing was the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he undertook to redeem a ruined world!

[He well knew, that, as the surety and substitute of sinners, he must bear all that the violated law would have inflicted upon them. And, if to us, who are by nature alienated from God, it is such a dreadful thing to endure the hidings of his face and the terrors of his wrath, what must it be to that immaculate Lamb of God, who from all eternity "lay in the bosom of his Father," and "was daily his delight[l]!" Yet behold, having undertaken for us, he suffered all that was due to us, "He the just, for us the unjust!" From his youth up was "he a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:" and, especially at the close of his life, he drank to the very dregs the cup of bitterness that must otherwise have been put into our hands. Truly "he was made a curse for us:" and so grievously did he suffer under the united assaults of men and devils, and from a sense also of his Father's wrath, that he sweat great drops of blood, and, in the midst of his severest agonies, had yet further to bewail the hidings of his

[k] Job vii. 14, 15. [l] John i. 18. & Prov. viii. 30

his Father's face; "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Let us learn to estimate as we ought this stupendous mystery, of "God manifest in the flesh," to expiate by his own sufferings the sins of his rebellious creatures. O let us contemplate this mystery, till we are altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise!]

4. How awful will be the state of all who die without an interest in Christ!

[This which Heman so bitterly bewails as his portion in this world, will, in an infinitely higher degree, be the portion of all who shall perish in their sins. They will indeed be "cast out from God's sight," as objects of his everlasting abhorrence. Never to all eternity will they have one look from him, but will behold "his face turned away" from them, and "his fierce wrath" executed upon them. Verily, "whilst they suffer his terrors, they will be distracted." Who can conceive the distraction of their minds at the overwhelming thought of eternity? Oh! what "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth" will there be amongst that wretched assembly, whose agonies are so insupportable, and whose prospects so interminable! But thus it must be, if we will not flee to that Saviour, who has laid down his life for us. Shall we not then awake from our slumbers? Shall we not cry unto our God, now that his ear is open to our petitions? Shall we stay till we come into that place of torment, and have an impassable gulph fixed between him and us? O let us "seek the Lord whilst he may be found, and call upon him whilst he is near:" then, though we should not enjoy all that we may wish for here, we shall hereafter; and even by our occasional sorrows here be fitted for an uninterrupted fruition of his glory to all eternity.]

## CCCXCVII.

### THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST TO SAVE.

Ps. lxxxix. 19. *Thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty.*

HOW joyful must these tidings be, to whomsoever they may have respect! Suppose them to refer to an oppressed nation, the raising up to them a mighty deliverer must be a rich, inestimable blessing: and such were David and Solomon, who were raised up to govern Israel, and to put all their enemies under their feet. But a greater than David or Solomon is here. The words spoken by God to Samuel did certainly, in their

their primary sense, relate to David[a]; as those spoken afterwards to Nathan did to Solomon[b]. But their ultimate reference was to Christ[c], who is the true David[d], and the Son of David[e]. On him was laid all the help that the Israel of God required; and God the Father declared beforehand, to his holy Prophets, the sufficiency of Christ to discharge the office committed to him.

Two things are here obviously presented to us for our consideration:

I. The office committed unto Christ—

What this was, may be known from the necessities of fallen man; because it was to supply them that he was sent into the world. It was then,

1. To make reconciliation for man—

[This was a work which no man could accomplish for himself; a work which all the angels in heaven were unequal to perform. Satisfaction must be made for sin; made too in the nature that had sinned. The curse due to sin must be borne, even the wrath of Almighty God. Who could afford us this help? who could sustain this weight? It would crush in an instant the highest archangel. None could endure it, but God's co-equal Son. He cheerfully undertaking to bear it for us, the Father made him our substitute; that divine justice being satisfied, and the law magnified by his obedience unto death, mercy might be extended unto us, and reconciliation be made between God and his offending creatures.]

2. To effect their complete salvation—

[It was not enough to die for them: they were wandering afar off, and they must be searched out; they were in rebellion, and must be subdued: when brought home to their Father's house, they are weak, and must be upheld; tempted, and must be strengthened; beset with enemies, and must be protected: they must never be left to themselves one moment: they must have every thing done for them, and in them: the whole care of preserving them, from first to last, must be devolved on him who undertakes for them: they must be "carried in the arms," "dandled on the knees," fed at the breast, and be watched over exactly like new-born infants. Nothing less than this will suffice for them. Though there be millions of them spread over the face of the whole globe, they must all be attended to as much as

[a] 1 Sam. xvi. 1. [b] 2 Sam. vii. 12—16.
[c] Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14. with Heb. i. 5.
[d] Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. & Hos. iii. 5. [e] Matt. xxii. 42.

as if there were only one. What a work was this to undertake! Yet was this "the help which God laid upon" his dear Son.]

But weighty as this office is, we have no reason to doubt,

II. His sufficiency to discharge it—

To be convinced of this, we need only to consider,

1. His essential perfections—

[He is said to be "mighty." But the angels are also called mighty; yet are they not therefore able to execute such an office as this. But Jesus is almighty: he is expressly called "The mighty God[f]," even "God over all blessed for ever[g]." In him therefore are all the perfections of the Deity. He is omnipresent, to behold the states of men; omniscient, to discern the things that will be most expedient for their relief; and omnipotent, to effect whatever shall be most conducive to their good. Difficulties can be no difficulties with him. He who spake the universe into existence, can be at no loss to accomplish, every where, and at the same instant, whatsoever the necessities of his creatures may require.]

2. His Mediatorial endowments—

[As Mediator, he has received his qualifications from God the Father: and those qualifications are abundantly sufficient for the work assigned him. The Spirit has been given to him, not by measure, as to others, but without measure[h]: "In him, even in his human nature, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[i]." Hence "on him may be hanged every vessel, even all the glory of his Father's house[k]."]

But, not to mention the infinite merit of his blood, and the all-prevailing efficacy of his intercession ("through which he is able to save men to the uttermost"), he has, *as man*, qualifications which he could not have *as God*. He has, from his own experience of temptation, a tender sympathy with his tempted people, and a peculiar fitness and readiness to afford them all needful succour[l].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who feel not their need of Christ—

[You cannot be persuaded that you are in a guilty, helpless, and undone state. But wherefore did God lay help upon One that was so mighty? Did he exert himself thus without a cause? If not, the greatness of the remedy should shew you the extent and imminence of your danger. Be persuaded then to put away

[f] Isai. ix. 6. [g] Rom. ix. 5. [h] John iii. 34. [i] Col. ii. 9.
[k] Isai. xxii. 22—24. [l] Heb. ii. 18.

away your high thoughts of yourselves, Beg of God that you may feel in what a helpless and hopeless state you are without Christ: and never imagine that your repentance is at all genuine, till your sense of your misery corresponds, in some measure at least, with the provision which God has made for your relief.]

2. Those who are discouraged on account of their extreme weakness and sinfulness—

[That you should *be humbled* on this account is right enough: but why should you *fear?* Do you suppose, that when God laid help for you upon his dear Son, he was not aware how much would be necessary for your salvation? or, has he been disappointed in his Son, finding him, after all, unequal to the task assigned him? Be ashamed of your unbelieving fears. Come not to Christ, saying, "Lord, if thou *canst*, or if thou *wilt*;" but cast your burthen wholly upon him, and see whether he be not able and willing to sustain you. He himself says to you, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help[m]." This is your warrant to trust in him. "Trust in him therefore with all your heart, and he will bring to pass" whatsoever he sees to be needful for you. "Cast all your care upon him;" and you "shall be saved in him with an everlasting salvation."]

[m] Hos. xiii. 9.

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## CCCXCVIII.

### GOD'S ANGER A REASON FOR TURNING TO HIM.

Ps. xc. 11, 12. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

THIS psalm is entitled, "A prayer of Moses the man of God." It seems to have been written by Moses on account of the judgment denounced against the whole nation of Israel, that they should die in the wilderness[a]. It had been already executed to a great extent, God having consumed multitudes of them in his anger[b]: and the period of man's life was then reduced to its present standard of seventy or eighty years[c]. From this awful demonstration of God's displeasure, he is led to this reflection; "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" And then

[a] ver. 3. [b] ver. 5—7. [c] ver. 10.

then he prays, that the whole nation might be induced by the shortness and uncertainty of their lives to seek without delay the favour of their offended God: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

In accordance with our text let us also contemplate,

I. The inconceivable weight of God's anger—

Of course, in speaking of God's anger we must divest it of all those tumultuous feelings, which agitate the minds of men; and conceive of it as manifested only in his dispensations towards the objects of his displeasure.

Let us contemplate it then,

1. As it appears in this world—

[The whole world bears the evidence of being under the displeasure of an angry God. The creation itself, even the animal and vegetable, as well as the rational parts of it, is greatly changed since it came out of its Creator's hands. A curse has been inflicted on it all, on account of sin. Storms, and tempests, and earthquakes, and pestilences, and diseases of every kind, and death with its antecedent pains and its attendant horrors, are all the sad fruits of sin, and the effects of God's anger on account of sin. Death has obtained an universal empire, and "reigns even over those who have never sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," as well as over the actual transgressors of God's law.

But the anger of God is yet more strikingly visible in those particular judgments which God has executed upon men from time to time. Behold the plagues in Egypt, the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, and of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea! behold the awful judgments inflicted on Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, and on the myriads, who, by their lewdness, their unbelief, and their murmurings, drew down the wrath of God upon them[d]! behold fire and brimstone rained down from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain! yea, and the whole world, with every living creature except those contained in the ark, swept away by one universal deluge!—these serve as awful proofs of God's indignation against sin, and his determination to punish it according to its deserts.

There are other proofs, less visible indeed, but not less real, of God's anger, which may be found in the horrors of a guilty conscience, or the distresses of a soul that is under the hidings of his face. Hear what was Job's experience under a sense of God's

[d] 1 Cor. x. 8—10.

God's displeasure: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me; the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me[e]." To the same effect the Psalmist also speaks, when describing the anguish of his own mind: "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart[f]." The unhappy end of Judas shews how insupportable is a sense of God's wrath, when the consolations of hope are altogether withdrawn.

But, after all, there is nothing that will give us such an idea of God's anger, as a view of the Lord Jesus Christ when "Jehovah's sword awoke against him" to inflict the penalty that was due to sin. Behold that immaculate Lamb of God sweating great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the inconceivable agonies of his soul! Hear him, in the depths of dereliction, crying, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" and see him, finally, giving up the ghost, and dying under the load of his people's sins! Could we at all appreciate this mystery, we should indeed say, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?"

But let us contemplate it,]

2. As it appears in the world to come—

[Of this however we can form but little conception. The terms which are used to depict the misery of the fallen angels, and of those who from amongst the human race have died in their sins, though exceeding terrible to the imagination, fall infinitely short of the reality. But the very circumstance of millions of once happy angels, as happy as any that are now before the throne of God, being cast out of heaven for their pride; and hell itself being prepared by Almighty God for their reception, that they may there endure his wrath and indignation to the uttermost—this very circumstance, I say, may serve to shew, how deeply God abhors iniquity, and how fearfully he will punish it. Of the place where they are confined "in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day," Tophet, as described by the prophet Isaiah, may be considered as a type or emblem: "It is a place both deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood: and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it[g]." And the state of the unhappy sufferers there is thus described in the Revelation of St. John: "They drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation: and they are tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels,

[e] Job vi. 4. [f] Ps. xxxviii. 2—8. [g] Isai. xxx. 33.

angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night[h]." Yet, terrible as this description is, it conveys no adequate idea either of the torment itself, or even of those foretastes of it, which are sometimes given to those for whom it is prepared. Well therefore may it be asked, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" and well is it added, "According to thy fear," that is, according to the terror which the very apprehension of it excites, "so is thy wrath:" for, in truth, it not only equals, but infinitely exceeds, all the conceptions that can be formed of it.]

The whole scope both of the preceding and following context leads us to consider,

II. The wisdom of seeking reconciliation with him without delay—

Notwithstanding his anger against sin, God is willing to be reconciled to his offending people—

["He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever." "Many times did he turn away his wrath from his people in the wilderness; and did not suffer his whole displeasure to arise." He has even sent his own Son into the world to effect reconciliation by the blood of his cross. He could not consistently with his own honour pardon sin without an atonement made for it: and, that a sufficient atonement might be made, he gave his Son to "bear our iniquities in his own body on the tree," and to "be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." For the fallen angels he made no such provision: but for us he did: and he sends forth his servants into all the world, to proclaim his offers of mercy, and to "beseech sinners in his name to be reconciled to him" — — —]

To seek reconciliation with him then is our true wisdom—

[The world may account it folly, and may stigmatize all serious piety as needless preciseness: but we hesitate not to declare with David, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom[i];" and that the Prodigal's return to his father's house was an evidence, not, as his ungodly companions would say, of weakness and folly, but of his having attained a soundness of mind and judgment: for it was "*when he came to himself*" he said, I will return, and go to my father." Who that reflects upon the inconceivable weight of God's anger, and on the misery of those who are exposed to it, would continue one moment obnoxious to it, when God is offering him pardon, and

[h] Rev. xiv. 10, 11. [i] Ps. cxi. 10.

and beseeching him to accept of all spiritual and eternal blessings? — — —

But add to this the shortness and uncertainty of human life: Who that considers *this*, would delay to deprecate God's wrath, and to avail himself of the present hour to secure the proffered mercy? O beg of God to impress your minds with a sense of the shortness of time, and to "teach you so to number your days, that you may without delay apply your hearts unto wisdom." Obvious as this lesson is, you can never learn it, unless you are taught of God. You will be ever calculating upon months and years to come, when "you know not what a single day may bring forth." You may even, like the rich fool, be promising yourselves "years of ease and pleasure," when God may have said, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee[k]." To turn unto God *instantly* is true wisdom: to put it off to a more convenient season is folly and madness — — —"To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts[l]."]

But to this work you must "apply with your heart," your whole heart—

[It is not by *seeking* merely, but by "*striving*, to enter in at the strait gate," that you are to obtain acceptance with your God[m]. You must "*apply your heart*" unto wisdom: and "what your heart findeth to do, you must do it with all your might[n]"———]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who make light of God's wrath—

[There are, alas! too many who do this. "The wicked," as David says, "through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous: thy judgments are far above out of his sight: and as for all his enemies, *he puffeth at them*[o];" and, with Atheistical impiety, "says in his heart, God will not do good; neither will he do evil[p]." But consider, Brethren, whether you will think so lightly of God's judgments when you shall have begun to feel the weight of them? Think whether, on first opening your eyes in the invisible world, and beholding the face of your incensed God, you will not bewail your present supineness, and curse the day when you listened to the dictates of flesh and blood, instead of attending to the counsels of true wisdom? Oh! think, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger[q]? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings[r]?" I pray you to number your days, not as the world does, but as God directs you: and to consider every day as if

[k] Luke xii. 19, 20. [l] Ps. cxix. 60. Heb. iii. 7, 8.
[m] Luke xiii. 24. [n] Eccl. ix. 10. [o] Ps. x. 4, 5.
[p] Zeph. i. 12. [q] Nah. i. 6. [r] Isai. xxxiii. 14.

if it were to be your last. *This*, with God's blessing, will stir you up to redeem the present time," and will put energy into your exertions in "fleeing from the wrath to come." Whatever be your age, my advice is still the same: for "you know not whether your Lord will come in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning." "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, I would persuade you[s];" and "what I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch."]

2. Those who are in a state of reconciliation with him—

[Doubtless there are many amongst you, who can say with the Church of old, "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me[t]." To you then I would say, "Who knoweth the power of God's love? According to your hope, even your most sanguine hope, so is his mercy;" yes, and infinitely above all that either men or angels can conceive. Compare your state with that of those who are now lifting up their eyes in the torments of hell; and say, Whether eternity itself will suffice to express your obligations to Him who has redeemed you by his blood, and to the Father who has accepted that atonement in your behalf? Oh! bless without ceasing your reconciled God. Labour to count, if it were possible, the riches of his grace; and to explore "the height and depth and length and breadth of his incomprehensible love." And let the stupendous mercy vouchsafed unto you, quicken you to every possible expression of gratitude to your adorable Benefactor.]

[s] 2 Cor. v. 11. [t] Isai. xii. 1.

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## CCCXCIX.

### THE BEAUTY OF JEHOVAH IMPARTED TO HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. xc. 17. *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!*

IT is pleasing to think that in every age the Lord has many "hidden ones:" even as in the days of Elijah, who thought himself the only worshipper of Jehovah, whilst there were in reality "seven thousand men who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal." It is not every one who dies apparently under the displeasure of God, that will be visited with his judgments in the world to come. Many "are judged of the Lord now, in order that they

they may not be condemned with the world hereafter[a]." Amongst those who died in the wilderness for their transgressions, we know, infallibly, that some were received to mercy. We have no more doubt of the salvation of Moses and Aaron than we have of any saint from the foundation of the world. And we think that there is evidence in the psalm before us, that many repented in the wilderness, and that though "they were delivered, as it were, to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, their spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus[b]." When they found that the sentence passed against them could not be reversed, they humbled themselves before God for their iniquities; and in consequence thereof they found favour in his sight, passing their remaining days upon earth in some measure of peace, and enjoying a hope, that, though they were never to possess the earthly Canaan, they should be admitted to the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance. Their supplications for mercy were such as God never did, nor ever will, reject. "O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children: and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us:" that is, Let us have such tokens of thy love, and such communications of thy grace, as may carry us forward with comfort, and prepare us for thy more immediate presence.

For the further elucidation of my text, I will endeavour to shew,

I. Wherein the beauty of the Lord our God consists—

But in attempting to speak on such a subject, I feel that I shall only "darken counsel by words without knowledge:" for "we cannot by searching find out God, we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection."

[a] 1 Cor. xi. 32. [b] 1 Cor. v. 5.

perfection." Yet, as we are able, we must declare him unto you, and set forth his perfections,

1. As existing in himself—

[We need only open our eyes and survey the visible creation, to be assured of his eternal power and godhead. In this respect the most stupid heathens, in neglecting to worship him, are without excuse. The magnitude and number of the heavenly bodies, all moving so exactly in their respective courses, and fulfilling the ends for which they were designed; and the variety and beauty of the things existing on this terraqueous globe, all so adapted for their respective offices and uses, and all subservient to one great design, the glory of their Creator; evince that his wisdom and goodness are equal to his power. I am not aware that philosophers have any advantage over those of less intelligence in things which are known only by revelation: because those things can be known only by the teachings of God's Spirit; and the Holy Spirit can instruct one as easily as another, and does often "reveal to babes what is hid from the wise and prudent:" but in the things which are obvious to our senses they have a great advantage, because by their proficiency in different sciences they attain a comprehensive knowledge of many things, of which the generality of persons have no conception; and consequently, they can discern traces of divine wisdom, and goodness, and power, which can never come under the view of one that is illiterate and uninformed.

If from the works of Creation we turn our eyes to the dispensations of Providence, we shall see all the same perfections illustrated and displayed to yet greater advantage; because they shew how entirely every created being, however unconscious, or however adverse, fulfils his will, and executes his designs——

But it is in the work of Redemption that the perfections of God must be chiefly viewed; because in that are displayed his justice, his mercy, and his grace; for the exercise of which there is, in the works of creation and of providence, comparatively but little scope.

But, to discover these, we must view them,]

As displayed in the person of his Son—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is called "the image of the invisible God[c]," because in him Jehovah, "who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see[d]," is rendered visible to mortal eyes; so that in him we see "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[e]." We know that "in his face all the glory of the Godhead shines;" and that on that account the god of this world is so anxious to blind our eyes, and to hide him from our view[f].

See

[c] Col. i. 15. [d] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [e] Heb. i. 3. [f] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

See then in him, and in his cross, not some perfections only, but all, even all the perfections of the Godhead shining in their utmost splendor. Draw nigh to the garden of Gethsemane, or to Mount Calvary, and there take a view of your adorable Saviour. How awful does the justice of the Deity appear, when not one sinner in the universe could be received to mercy, nor one single transgression of God's law be pardoned, till an atonement should be offered for it, not by any creature, but by the Creator himself, whose blood alone could expiate our guilt, and whose righteousness alone could serve as a sufficient title for our acceptance before God! And how bright does mercy appear, in that, rather than man should perish after the example of the fallen angels, God vouchsafed to give his only dear Son to die for us, and to effect our reconciliation by the blood of his cross! What wisdom too is displayed in this way of making the truth of God, which denounced death as the penalty of sin, to consist with the happiness and salvation of those who had committed it! as the Psalmist says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other[g]." To make these perfections unite in the salvation of men, and to bring to every perfection far higher glory than it could have had if it had stood alone; (for whilst each shines in its own proper glory, each has a tenfold lustre reflected on it by the opposite perfection with which it is made to harmonize;) *this* required the utmost possible effort both of wisdom and grace; and to all eternity will it form the chief subject of adoration and praise amongst all the hosts of heaven. Here is God seen as "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, whilst he by no means clears the guilty[h];" because their guilt has been expiated, and a righteousness has been wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ, so that God is "a just God, and yet a Saviour[i]," and is no less just than he is merciful, in every exercise of his pardoning love, and in every blessing which he bestows on his redeemed people[k]."]

The petition offered respecting this, leads us to inquire,

II. In what respects we may hope that "this beauty shall be on us"—

Had the prayer been offered by Moses alone, like that, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory[l]," we might have supposed, that it was a peculiar favour, which other saints had no right to expect. But the prayer was uttered by multitudes, even by the great mass

[g] Ps. lxxxv. 10. [h] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [i] Isai. xlv. 21.
[k] 1 John i. 9. [l] Exod. xxxiii. 18.

mass of those who repented in the wilderness: and therefore it may be poured forth by all true penitents amongst ourselves, who may expect that "the beauty of the Lord shall be upon them:"

1. By an outward manifestation of it to our minds—

[To the Corinthian Church was this honour vouchsafed: for "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness at the first creation, shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[m]." Such manifestations therefore may we also expect. The Lord Jesus Christ has expressly promised, that he will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world: and with such convincing evidence will he shew us his glory, that we shall differ from those around us, as Paul at his conversion differed from his attendants: they heard a voice as well as he; but he alone was favoured with a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ himself[n]: so that the words which we hear or read may be heard or read by thousands; but to us only, that is, to those only who are truly penitent and believing, will he "manifest forth his glory," so as to constrain us to cry out, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty[o]!"

It is by the public ordinances chiefly that he will make these revelations of himself to us: and hence it was that David so exceedingly delighted in the house of God, saying, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, *to behold the fair beauty of the Lord*[p]." If only we come up to his house with raised expectations, and a humble mind, he will reveal himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and shew us "his power and glory so as he is accustomed to display them in his sanctuary[q]."]

2. By an inward communication of it to our souls—

["God originally made man after his own image[r]:" and after the same image will he create us anew "in righteousness and true holiness[s]." It is for this very end that he so reveals himself in his ordinances; namely, that, by communing with him there, our faces may be made to shine, as the face of Moses did[t]; and that "by beholding his glory we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God[u]." In this sense the beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon all his children,

[m] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [n] Acts ix. 7. 1 Cor. ix. 1. & xv. 8.
[o] Zech. ix. 17. [p] Ps. xxvii. 4. [q] Ps. lxiii. 2.
[r] Gen. i. 26, 27. [s] Eph. iv. 24. [t] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30.
[u] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

dren, according as it is written, "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure[x]." No inferior standard will they aim at: they know their duty; and they know their privilege: and with no attainments will they be satisfied, till they "are holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, even as their Father that is in heaven is perfect."

This indeed will not be imparted to any one at once: it is a progressive work: persons must be babes, and young men, before they are fathers: but from the time that they are truly converted unto God, they will "grow in grace," and "make their profiting to appear," till they have "attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ[y]." To all of you then I would say, Offer up with devoutest earnestness to God the petition in my text, "Let THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD our God be upon us;" and add to it that prayer of Paul for the Ephesian converts, which in import corresponds exactly with it; "Let me so comprehend the love of Christ, as to be filled by it with all THE FULNESS OF GOD."]

From the text thus explained, we may LEARN,

1. What is the great antidote to the troubles of life—

[Certainly the Israelites, when doomed to perish in the wilderness, were in a very pitiable condition. But, if they could only attain this great object, they declared that their sorrows would all be turned into joy[z]. So, whatever our troubles be, their sting will be altogether taken away, if they prevail to bring us to the footstool of our God, and to the enjoyment of the light of his countenance. The trials which God sends are for this very end; to purge away our dross, and to purify us as gold, that we may be vessels of honour, meet for our Master's use. Let us then not be so anxious to get rid of our afflictions, as to obtain from God a sanctified use of them, in *brighter manifestations of him*, and *richer communications from him*, and *a more entire conformity to him*[a]. Let us but get even a small measure of these benefits, and "our consolations shall abound far above all that our afflictions have abounded[b]" — — —]

2. What we are to aim at, in our pursuit of holiness—

[It is not any one grace, or any particular set of graces, that we should seek after, but an entire conformity to the image of our God. Now his beauty, as we have seen, consists not in any one perfection, but in an union of all perfections, however opposite to each other. So must there be in us, not such graces only

[x] 1 John iii. 3. [y] Eph. iv. 13. [z] Eph. iii. 18, 19.
[a] ver. 15. [b] 2 Cor. i. 5.

only as are suited to the natural temperament of our minds, but an assemblage of all graces, however different from each other; every one being blended with, and tempered by, its opposite, and all together brought, as occasion may require, into united exercise. God is compared to "light;" which is an union of rays, exceedingly diverse from each other, and all in simultaneous motion. Now as some may think that the brighter coloured rays, as the red, the orange, the yellow, would make a better light if divested of those which bear a more sombre aspect, as the blue, the violet, and the indigo; so many imagine, that God would be more lovely, if justice were separated from his attributes, and mercy were to shine unalloyed by that more formidable perfection. But as neither can light part with any of its rays, nor God with any of his perfections, so neither must the Christian dispense with any grace whatever: if he rejoice, it must be with trembling: if he walk in faith, he must be also in the fear of the Lord all the day long. If he be bold, he must also be meek and lowly of heart, and resemble him, who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth." This union of opposite graces it is which constitutes the beauty of holiness: as David, after the most exalted strains of adoration, says, "O worship the Lord in *the beauty of holiness; fear before him* all the earth[c]."

Let me earnestly intreat the professors of religion to be attentive to this matter. Nothing is more common than for persons of this description to value themselves on account of some particular grace or set of graces, when they are offensive, and, I had almost said, odious, in the eyes both of God and man, for want of those graces which ought to temper, and to moderate, the actings of their mind. Distortion in the human frame is not more disgusting, than such distorted piety as this. Even without any particular blemish in the human frame, it is not any one feature that constitutes beauty; but a regular and harmonious set of features: so it is not faith, or fear, or zeal, or prudence, or any other separate grace, that will assimilate us to the Deity, but every grace in its proper measure, and its combined exercise; or rather every grace borrowing from its opposite its chief lustre, and all harmoniously exercised for the glory of God.

Were this subject better understood, we should see, as in Christ, so in all his followers also, the God and the man, the lion and the lamb.]

[c] Ps. xcvi. 7—9.

## CCCC.

### THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO DWELL IN GOD.

Ps. xci. 9, 10. *Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee.*

IT is scarcely possible to conceive any terms more strong, or any images more lively, than those in which the Scripture represents the privileges of Believers. We need look no further than to the psalm before us for a confirmation of this truth. Indeed, according to the view given of this psalm by a learned Prelate, there is, in the first verses of it, an emphasis which cannot be surpassed[a]. And the whole may be considered as the Believer's charter, in which all his privileges are contained, from his first acceptance with God to the consummation of his happiness in glory.

We have in the words of our text a just description of the Believer:

I. His experience—

The true Christian is one who has been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Being once brought to God, he "makes the Most High his habitation." He regards God, not merely as reconciled to him, but as affording him (what a dwelling-house affords to its possessor),

1. Free access—

[A person goes familiarly to his house at all times, not doubting but that he shall gain a ready admission into it. He considers it as his own, and feels that it exists only for his accommodation. It is thus that the Believer goes to God as his God: he has "access to him with boldness and confidence:" he is certain that, when he calls, he shall receive an answer; and "when he knocks, the door will be opened to him." In this precise

[a] Bishop Horne reads the two first verses thus: "He that dwelleth &c. *who abideth* under &c. *who saith* of the Lord," &c. Then at the end of ver. 2, he supposes the Psalmist to break off abruptly, and, instead of continuing his description, to address himself to the person before described; "Surely he shall deliver *thee*."

precise view the Psalmist speaks of God; "Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort[b]."]

2. Necessary provision—

[Every man, whatever be his situation in life, expects to find in his own house the things suited to his necessities. He does not seek his meals at the houses of his neighbours, but in his own; and he returns home at stated seasons to partake of them. And whither does the Believer go for daily supplies of bread for his soul? It is in Christ Jesus that his fulness is treasured up, and in him the Believer expects to find the "grace that is sufficient for him." God invites him to come to him for the express purpose, that he may be filled and satisfied with good things: "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness[c]."]

3. Sure protection—

[If storms descend, or dangers menace, we take refuge in our house, and find it a place of safety. Thus "the name of God also is a strong tower, to which the righteous runneth and is safe[d]." It is to himself that God invites us, when he says, "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, shut the door about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast[e]." And that this was a primary idea in the mind of the Psalmist, appears from the very words of the text, wherein he calls God "his Refuge," and from the whole scope of the psalm, from the beginning to the end. With this also agrees the beautiful description given of Jesus by the Prophet, as "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest[f]."]

4. Sweet repose—

[To his house a man retires from the noise and bustle of the world; and there he lays himself down to rest after the fatigues of the day. Home, though inferior in many respects to places of temporary residence, is to almost all persons the most agreeable, because there they are most at ease. And such is God to the Believer. "In every place, God is to him as a little sanctuary[g]," where he finds himself at rest. He carries his wants to God, and "casts all his care on him," and enjoys peace which passeth all understanding. In this sense he says *for his own encouragement*, "Return unto thy *Rest*, O my soul:" and attests *for the glory of his God*, "Lord thou hast been our *dwelling-place* in all generations[h]."]

In connexion with this experience of the Believer, let us consider,

II. His

[b] Ps. lxxi. 3. [c] Isai. lv. 2. [d] Prov. xviii. 10. [e] Isai xxvi. 20.
[f] Isai. xxxii. 2. [g] Ezek. xi. 16. [h] Ps. xc. 1.

II. His privilege—

The expression in the text seems to exceed the bounds of truth: but the more it is examined, the more will it be found to be strictly true. The man who makes God his habitation shall have no evil befall him:

1. None here—

[No *casual* evil shall befall him. There is no such thing as chance; every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, is ordered of the Lord. As for the children of God, "their heavenly Father hath given his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their ways[i];" and if any thing were to happen to them, *they* (the angels) would contract a fearful responsibility for their neglect. We must not however imagine that Believers are at liberty to rush into needless dangers; for our Lord, when tempted by Satan to cast himself from a pinnacle of the Temple in expectation that the angels would preserve him from injury, replied, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:" but nothing can happen to them except by the Divine appointment: they are hid in the shadow of their Father's hand, and "their very hairs are all numbered."

But it may be thought that *penal* evil may come to them. This however we utterly deny. That they may be "visited with the rod," we readily acknowledge: but there is great difference between the vindictive arm of an incensed judge, and the gentle chastisements of an indulgent parent. The cup that may at any time be put into their hands may be bitter; but it has not in it one drop of wrath: it is altogether mixed by love; and not an ingredient can be found in it, which they themselves shall not one day confess to have been salutary and beneficial.

In short, no *real* evil shall befall them. That they may have troubles, is certain: that their troubles may be heavy and accumulated, is also certain. But who accounts even the amputation of a limb *evil*, if it be the only and infallible method of preserving life? Much less then are any sufferings to be accounted evil, which the Believer can ever be called to sustain: for he shall never endure any, which shall not work for good to him in this life, and be the means of increasing his weight of glory in the next[k].]

2. None hereafter—

[It is in this life only that the Believer can meet with even the semblance of evil: when he goes hence, he is instantly placed beyond the reach of harm. No sin, no sorrow, no pain, no temptation, no weariness, no want, can ever be felt by him in the

[i] See ver. 11, 12. [k] Rom. viii. 28. & 2 Cor. iv. 17.

the mansions of bliss. He will there enjoy for ever one unclouded day; and his happiness will be without alloy, without intermission, without end[l].]

To render this subject more instructive, we shall ADD a word,

1. Of direction—

[Christ, in reference to the sheepfold of his Church, says, "I am the door; if any man enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture[m]." The same figure we may apply to the subject before us: "Christ is the door;" he is "the way to the Father;" and "no man cometh unto the Father, but by him." To those who come to God in any other way, he is not "a Refuge," or "Habitation," but "a consuming fire[n]." But if we believe in Christ, then "will he dwell in us, and we shall dwell in him[o]:" yea, "he will be our house of defence, to save us for ever[p]."]

2. Of warning—

[Who, except the Believer, can apply to himself the promise in the text? As for the unbelieving and disobedient, they are in danger every hour: they know not but that God's wrath may break forth against them the very next moment to their destruction. Of this they are certain, (whether they will believe it or not,) that in a little time his judgments shall overtake them, and the greatest of all evils shall befall them, unless they repent. O that they would be prevailed upon to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them! O that they would now seek to be "found in Christ!" Then should the destroying angel pass over them, and "they should dwell safely, and be quiet from the fear of evil[q]."]

3. Of encouragement—

[The weakness of men's faith often robs them of the comfort which it is their privilege to enjoy. Why should a Believer be afraid of thunder and lightning? Were he but sensible what a Protector he has, he would feel assured that no evil could come unto him. How varied are God's promises to him in the psalm before us! How diversified also are the assurances given him by Eliphaz in the book of Job[r]! Let him only commit himself to God, and he has nothing to fear. Let us then, Beloved, have faith in God; and let those words of David be our song in this land of our pilgrimage; "God is our refuge, &c.; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the waters be carried into the midst of the sea[s]: &c."]

[l] Rev. xxi. 4.
[m] John x. 9.
[n] Heb. xii. 29.
[o] John vi. 56.
[p] Ps. xxxi. 2.
[q] Prov. i. 33.
[r] Job v. 19—24.
[s] Ps. xlvi. 1—4.

## CCCCI.

### DEVOTION TO GOD RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

Ps. xcv. 6—11. *O come, let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: unto whom I sware in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.*

IN the former part of this psalm, the Jewish people, for whom it was composed, mutually exhorted each other: in the latter part, God himself is the speaker: and the manner in which this latter part is cited in the Epistle to the Hebrews, shews, that the whole psalm is as proper for the use of the Christian, as it was of the Jewish, Church. The peculiar circumstance of its consisting of a mutual exhortation is there expressly noticed; and noticed with particular approbation: "*Exhort one another daily*, while it is called To-day[a]." This hint the Compilers of our Liturgy attended to, when they appointed this psalm to be read constantly in the Morning Service, as introductory to the other psalms that should come in rotation: and, as being so appointed, it deserves from us a more than ordinary attention.

In discoursing upon it, we shall notice,

I. The exhortation—

[The proper object of our worship is here described. As addressed to the Jews, the terms here used would fix their attention on Jehovah, as contra-distinguished from all false gods: but, as addressed to Christians, they lead our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "God with us," even "God over all, blessed for evermore." HE is our *Maker*; for "by him were all things created, both which are in heaven and in earth[b]." He is "the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep," and who watches over them, and preserves them day and night[c]——— HIM then we must worship with all humility of mind, "bowing down,

[a] Heb. iii. 13. [b] John i. 3.
[c] John x. 11. Heb. xiii. 20. Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.

down, and kneeling before him." At his hands must we seek for mercy, even through the all-atoning sacrifice — — — and from him, as our living Head, must we look for all necessary supplies of grace and peace — — —

O come, let us thus approach him! let us do it not merely in the public services of our Church, but in our secret chambers; and not occasionally only, but constantly; having all our dependence upon him, and all our expectations from him.]

That this exhortation may not be in vain, we intreat you to consider,

II. The warning with which it is enforced—

[The Jews who, in the wilderness, disobeyed the heavenly call, were never suffered to enter into the land of Canaan. In the judgments inflicted upon them, they are held forth as a warning to us[d]. Like them, we have seen all the wonders of God's love, in delivering us from a far sorer than Egyptian bondage. Like them, we have had spiritual food administered to us in rich abundance in the Gospel of Christ: And if, like them, we harden our hearts, and rebel against our God, like them, we must be excluded from the heavenly Canaan. They by their obstinacy provoked God to exclude them with an oath: O that we may never provoke him to "swear that we also shall never enter into his rest!" That we are in danger of bringing this awful judgment on ourselves is evident from the intimation given us by the Apostle Jude[e], and yet more plainly from the warnings which St. Paul founds on this very passage[f] — — — Let us then "hear the voice" of our good Shepherd, ere it be too late. Let us "grieve him" no longer — — — but let us turn to him with our whole hearts — — — Caleb and Joshua were admitted into Canaan, because "they followed the Lord fully:" let us follow him fully, and we shall certainly attain the promised rest.]

After the example of St. Paul, we would with all earnestness *caution* you against,

1. Unbelief—

[The Jews believed neither the promises nor the threatenings of God, and therefore they perished. Let us beware lest we fall after the same example of unbelief[g]. If we will not believe that we stand in need of mercy to the extent that God has declared, or that the service of God is so reasonable and blessed as he has represented it to be, or that the judgments of God shall infallibly come on all who refuse to serve him, there is no hope: we must perish, notwithstanding all the offers of mercy that are sent to us: for "the

[d] 1 Cor. x. 1—11. [e] ver. 5. [f] Heb. iii. 7—19. & iv. 1.
[g] Heb. iv. 12.

"the word preached cannot profit us, if it be not mixed with faith in them that hear it[h]."]

2. Hardness of heart—

[As Israel hardened themselves against God when his messages were sent them by Moses, so do many now harden themselves against the word preached by the Ministers of Christ. They "puff at" all the judgments denounced against them[i]. But "who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?" O "will your hearts be stout in the day that HE shall deal with you? and will you thunder with a voice like his?" Be persuaded: humble yourselves before him, yea, "bow down and kneel before him," and never cease to cry for mercy, till he has turned away his anger, and spoken peace to your souls.]

3. Delay—

["To-day," says the Psalmist: "To-day, while it is called To-day," says the Apostle Paul: and "To-day," would I say: yes, Brethren, "to-day" "harden not your hearts;" for you know not what a day may bring forth. Before another day you may be taken into the eternal world; or, if not, you may provoke God to swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest; and then your remaining days will answer no other end, than to fill up the measure of your iniquities. But surely you have grieved him long enough already; some of you twenty, some thirty, some perhaps even "forty years." Let there be an end of this rebellion against your Maker and your Redeemer, and let this, which is with him the day of grace, be to you "the day of salvation."]

[h] Heb. iv. 2. [i] Ps. x. 4, 5.

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## CCCCII.

### THE DUTY OF MAKING CHRIST KNOWN TO THE HEATHEN.

Ps. xcvi. 1—3. *O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord; bless his name: shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.*

TO any one who looks even in the most superficial manner into the holy Scriptures, there must appear a very wide difference between the experience of the saints recorded there, and that which is found amongst persons reputed saints in the present day. The

The Saviour himself is not so much the object of holy glorying, as he was amongst some, who looked forward to him at the distance of a thousand years; nor are the same elevated affections towards him brought into exercise, as were displayed by them. A man who should now exclaim, as David did, "O *sing unto the Lord* a new song; *sing unto the Lord*, all the earth: *sing unto the Lord;* bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day;" he, I say, would be accounted an enthusiast at least; and it would be well if he were not characterized by a yet harsher term. But religion is, or ought to be, the same in all ages; except indeed that our views of Christ should be more elevated, and our delight in him be more ardent, in proportion as our means of knowing him are more ample, and our motives to love him more enlarged. The psalm before us undoubtedly refers to him; for it speaks expressly of the publication of his Gospel to the Gentile world. It is indeed only a part of a psalm written originally by David at the time of his bringing up the ark to Mount Zion from the house of Obed-edom[a]: and this part was selected afterwards for the constant use of the Church, as being calculated to keep up in the minds of men an expectation of the Messiah, and to prepare their hearts for the reception of him.

In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read, we shall,

I. Point out your duty to the Lord Jesus Christ—

In speaking to persons who profess to derive all their hopes of salvation from the Lord Jesus, methinks it is scarcely necessary to say, that,

1. We should praise him ourselves—

[We should not be content to acknowledge him in words; we should feel towards him in deed, as our "All in all[b]." These feelings we should express in songs of praise: or if we be silent as to our voice, we should at least "make melody to him in our hearts;" "blessing" and adoring him from our inmost souls.

We should sing to him "a *new* song." It was so called by David,

[a] 1 Chron. xvi. 7—36. [b] 1 John iii. 18.

David, because it was a song that was to be sung especially at the introduction of the Christian dispensation, the events predicted and shadowed forth being then fulfilled. But it is still a *new* song to all who sing it; because in their unconverted state they have no disposition, no ability to sing it: "they cannot, *in that sense*, say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost[c]." Moreover, it will to all eternity continue *new*; fresh discoveries of his glory being ever manifested to the soul, and fresh energies supplied for the celebration of his praise. Hence in heaven itself the songs of all the glorified saints are thus designated: "they sing unto the Lord a *new* song[d]." Thus "from day to day" *our* harps should be tuned afresh, and our praises ascend to heaven with every breath we draw.]

2. We should make him known to others—

[Who that had ever tasted of the blessings of salvation would "eat his morsel alone?" who would not wish all the world to partake with him? Yes surely, we should "declare his glory among the heathen, and his wonders among all people." O what "wonders" of love and mercy have we to proclaim! Who can reflect on the person of our "Emmanuel, who is God with us," leaving the bosom of his Father, taking our nature, bearing our sins, and effecting by his obedience unto death our reconciliation with God; who, I say, can reflect on this, and not desire to make it known to all the sinners of mankind? In a word, who can have beheld "the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ," and not desire to reflect the light of it on all who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death? This is undoubtedly our duty: we are not to put our light under a bushel, but to set it on a candlestick, that all the world, if possible, may see the light.]

This then being our duty to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will proceed to,

II. Call you to the performance of it—

Consider,

1. Your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[How inconceivably great are these! If we attempt to estimate them, where shall we begin? or, having begun, where shall we end? If you have not yet experienced his converting grace, the very provision of a salvation for you, a salvation so dearly bought, and so freely offered, demands from you every tribute of love and gratitude that you can ever pay. But if you have reason to think yourselves partakers of this salvation, and are enabled with appropriating faith to say, "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*," there should be no bounds to your zeal and diligence in his service. Time, talents, property, yea life itself, should be esteemed

[c] 1 Cor. xii. 3. [d] Rev. v. 9. & xiv. 3.

esteemed by you as of no value, any farther than they may enable you to glorify his name. Enter then minutely into the consideration of this subject, and say, Whether, "if *you* hold your peace, the very stones will not cry out against you?"

2. The necessities of the heathen world—

[The whole Scriptures speak of the heathen world as perishing for lack of knowledge: and though we will not presume to say, that none of them shall be made partakers of God's mercy for Christ's sake; yet we are sure, that, as a body, they are under a sentence of guilt and condemnation. Can we then know the remedy which God has provided for them, and not feel ourselves bound to reveal it to them, and to labour, as far as possible, to extend to them its saving benefits? Can we reflect on the unhappy state of the Jews, and not pity them; blinded as they are by prejudice, and bent as they are on their own destruction? Can we look on all the different classes of the Gentile world, and see what penances they endure to pacify the supposed wrath of their senseless idols, and not feel a desire to proclaim to them the glad tidings of the Gospel? If it would be our duty to stretch out our hand to one sinking in the waters, and to rescue him from destruction, much more is it our duty to exert ourselves to the utmost of our power for the preservation of a ruined world.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are lukewarm in the cause of Christ—

[Many are so afraid of enthusiasm, that they banish from their minds all that may subject them to such an imputation. Hence, whilst they are correct and accurate in their principles, they are grievously defective in the sublimer parts of practical religion: they have a form of godliness, but no experience of its power. But let such persons know, that the Lord Jesus Christ is more displeased with the lukewarmness of those who profess themselves his friends, than he is with the neglect of his avowed enemies[e]. If from our inmost souls we love him not, he denounces a solemn curse against us[f]: and if we serve him not with the talents entrusted to our care, he will require them at our hands, and punish us severely for our abuse of them[g].]

2. Those who are active in his service—

[God forbid that we should ever speak a word to discourage activity in the service of our Lord. But it it certain, that many are diligent in doing what they suppose to be his will, who yet are far from cultivating that spirit which he will approve. Pride, ostentation, and a variety of other corrupt motives, may stimulate men to exertion; whilst humility and modesty, and all the lovelier graces of the Spirit, are wanting in them. Look to it then, that your

[e] Rev. iii. 15, 16. [f] 1 Cor. xvi. 22. [g] Matt. xxvi. 20.

your love and zeal be duly tempered with reverence and godly fear. At the same time, take care that you do not become weary in well doing. Be on your guard that your love to the Saviour languish not, and that your endeavours to convert others to the knowledge of him be not relaxed. Try amongst your friends and neighbours to interest them in his salvation. Then extend your efforts to all, whether Jews or Gentiles: and "count not even life itself dear to you," if that you may but glorify him, and save the souls of your perishing fellow-creatures.]

## CCCCIII.

### A WISE DEPORTMENT DELINEATED.

Ps. ci. 2. *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*

EXTENSIVE influence is a most invaluable talent, which entails upon us an awful responsibility, and should therefore be improved with all possible care and diligence. The higher we are in the scale of society, the more our obligations to exert ourselves for God are increased. But, if wisdom direct not our measures, our most strenuous efforts will be in vain. David was well convinced of this truth; and, having seen in his own experience a wise admixture of mercy and of judgment in the dealings of God towards him, he determined, in his limited sphere of action, to imitate the conduct of the Governor of the Universe, and so to temper mercy with justice in the whole of his administration, that iniquity might be suppressed, and virtue cultivated, not in his own palace only, but throughout all his dominions. We might not unprofitably enter into an investigation of the principles which he laid down for the regulation of his conduct, and mark the specific course of action which he determined to pursue towards his courtiers; but we shall wave the consideration of those particulars, and notice rather the general principle which he adopted, and which is equally applicable to persons in every station of life; "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."

A noble

A noble resolution this! We will endeavour to point out,

I. The great importance of it—

The value of religion, *generally*, is acknowledged by all; but few are aware of the vast importance of a wise, discreet, and prudent deportment: yet on that essentially depend,

1. The peace and comfort of our own souls—

[An indiscreet conduct, even where the person's intentions on the whole are good, will involve him in many difficulties, and rob him of those supports and consolations which under other circumstances he might enjoy. True it is, that the wisest demeanor will not avail to root out prejudice, or to make religion lovely in the eyes of carnal men: for the children of darkness cannot but hate the light: and our blessed Lord himself, in whose conduct not the slightest fault or error could be found, was an object of universal hatred to the whole Jewish nation. But it is no less true, that imprudence in religious characters calls forth against them, and, in appearance, justifies, the malignity of many, who, if the zeal had been better regulated, would never have raised their arm against it. Many parents, masters, magistrates, who would never have interposed their authority to obstruct a prudent exercise of religion, have been induced to exert their power in consequence of the indiscretion of those whom they were constrained to oppose. In such cases their opposition can scarcely be called persecution; nor can the cross which the sufferers are called to bear, be called "the cross of *Christ*:" it is *their own* cross, that they have to bear, and *their own* folly, that they have to blame. Enthusiasts do indeed persuade themselves that they are suffering for righteousness' sake: but having no satisfactory evidence that such is indeed the true ground of their trials, they cannot feel that humble acquiescence in the Divine appointments, which, if they had acted a wiser part, would have calmed their spirits, and sweetened their afflictions[a].]

2. The benefit of all around us—

[Nothing can be more unreasonable than that men should condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it: but they will do so, and will take occasion from the misconduct of religious people to defame and decry all vital godliness[b].

It is of no consequence in their eyes, that the wise and prudent condemn the things that are complained of: no; their adversaries are not disposed to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent: they involve all in the same obloquy: and will bring the

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20. & iv. 15, 16.

[b] 2 Pet. ii. 2.

the faults of former ages as grounds of accusation against those who live in the present day[c]. Even the errors that were acknowledged and lamented by the persons who in early life committed them, are still adduced as characterizing not only the persons who openly renounced them, but those also who have never in any degree approximated towards them[d]: and all this is done for the purpose of discrediting religion, and of justifying their own aversion to it. On the other hand, great good is done by those who "walk circumspectly," and "shine forth as lights in the world[e]." They "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men[f]," and "shame those who falsely accuse their good conversation in Christ[g]." What St. Peter says of "wives winning by their good conversation their unbelieving husbands[h]," we doubt not is often verified in all other relations of life; those who behold the light that is set before them being constrained to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour[i]." A certain awe is impressed on the minds of the ungodly by the sight of "a man of God." "Herod feared John," when he saw what a just and holy man he was[k]: and it is particularly said of Saul, that, "*when he saw that David behaved himself very wisely, he feared him*[l]." And if we will walk "holily, justly, and unblameably before men," we shall have a testimony in their consciences, "that God is with us of a truth[m]," and that the principles we profess are "worthy of all acceptation[n]."]

3. The honour of God and his Gospel—

[The argument which St. Paul uses to enforce on servants the maintenance of a dutiful behaviour towards their unbelieving masters, is, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed[o]." How terrible is the thought that our indiscretions should ever produce such an effect as this! On the other hand, our blessed Lord bids us to "make our light shine before men, that they who behold our good works may be stirred up to glorify our heavenly Father[p]." What a stimulus is here! what a motive to circumspection! what an incentive to every thing that is great and holy! Believer, can you reflect one moment on the thought, that God may be glorified in you, and not determine, like David, to

[c] The errors of the Puritans are imputed to those who profess religion in the present day.

[d] This is particularly to be noticed in reference to the early journals of Messrs. Whitfield and Wesley; which, though afterwards condemned by the authors themselves, are to this hour made the sole grounds of estimating their character; and not their character only, but the characters of thousands who were never guilty of any of their extravagancies.

[e] See Phil. ii. 15, 16. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 15. [g] 1 Pet. iii. 16.
[h] 1 Pet. iii. 1. [i] Prov. xii. 26. [k] Mark vi. 20.
[l] 1 Sam. xviii. 15. [m] 1 Cor. xiv. 25. [n] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[o] 1 Tim. vi. 1. [p] Matt. v. 16.

to "walk wisely before him in a perfect way?" If nothing but your own welfare and the welfare of your fellow-creatures were at stake, you would watch over your every action, your every disposition: but, when you consider, that the honour of God himself is in a measure dependent upon you, methinks, you should be utterly purposed, that, if it be possible, "God himself shall not find any thing" amiss with you[q]; and that, at all events, your conduct shall be so blameless, "that they who are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you[r]."]

Having shewn the importance of this resolution, we will distinctly mark,

II. The way in which it must be carried into effect—

It is scarcely needful to say, that we must have respect to every commandment of God, without partiality or reserve; for where there is partiality, there is hypocrisy[s]; and where there is hypocrisy, there is neither "a perfect heart," nor "a perfect way," nor indeed one spark of true "wisdom." This then must be ever borne in mind, that without an unreserved endeavour to fulfil the whole will of God, the forming of such a resolution must be altogether nugatory and delusive. But supposing the resolution to be sincerely formed, then the question will arise, How must a person demean himself so as really to effect his wish? We answer, he must conduct himself,

1. With meekness and modesty—

[Nothing is more disgusting than forwardness in a religious character. It is offensive in any; but most of all in one who professes to feel himself a poor, blind, ignorant, guilty creature, "less than the least of all saints," yea, rather, "the very chief of sinners." How unseemly is it to see such an one full of conceit, obtrusive, talkative, loving pre-eminence, and "thinking himself to be something, when he is nothing[t]!" Yet how many such professors are there, wherever the Gospel is preached! On the other hand, how lovely is the character of one that is gentle, modest, unassuming, arrogating nothing to himself, and willing on all occasions to "take the lowest place!" Such a person, whilst he himself "is beautified with salvation[u]," reflects an honour on the Gospel, and "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour."

[q] Ps. xvii. 3. [r] Tit. ii. 8. [s] Jam. iii. 17.
[t] Gal. vi. 3. [u] Ps. cxlix. 4.

Saviour[x]." Such a disposition is lovely even in the sight of God himself, and is esteemed by him as "an ornament of great price[y]." It should seem that this was a distinguishing feature in our Lord's character, since the Apostle particularly beseeches us "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ[z]:" and the more we have of the mind of Christ in this respect, the more "wisely shall we walk both towards them that are without[a]" the pale of the Church, and those that are within. The want of this disposition renders our way far more difficult, whilst it incapacitates us for encountering the difficulties which it puts in our way. This then we conceive to be our first object, to obtain a humble and subdued spirit, which, whilst it offends none who differ from us, qualifies us to bear with patience, and to turn to good account, whatever evils the unreasonableness of wicked men may inflict upon us. By means of it we shall "out of the eater bring forth meat, and out of the strong bring forth sweet;" or, in other words, we shall make "all things work together for our good."]

2. With kindness and charity—

[There is really in many religious professors almost the same acrimony against the ungodly world, as there is in the ungodly world against them. But how unbecoming is this! for, if there be a difference between us and others, who is it that has made us to differ[b]? And, if we see others yet lying in their natural enmity against God, what does their state call for, but pity and compassion? Besides, love is the very end, yea the sum and substance, of all religion[c]. If we have not love, we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, and yet be no better than "sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals[d]." If this principle preside not in our hearts, we shall do nothing well[e]. This will lead us to consult the best interests of all around us: to study how we may most influence them for their good; and to bend to circumstances, in order to abate their prejudice, and gain the easier access to their minds. It was from this principle that St. Paul "became all things to all men[f]." If he might but "gain the more," he was ready to deny himself the most innocent enjoyments, and to comply with any requisitions, which would consist with fidelity to his God. How conciliatory will be the conduct of one who acts under this principle! With what "meekness will he give to an inquirer a reason of the hope that is in him[g]; and convey instruction to a blind and obstinate opposer[h]! How cautiously will he "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against him[i]!" How watchfully will he "abstain

[x] Tit. ii. 10.
[y] 1 Pet. iii. 4.
[z] 2 Cor. x. 1.
[a] Col. iv. 5.
[b] 1 Cor. iv. 7.
[c] 1 Tim. i. 5.
[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 1.
[e] 1 Cor. xvi. 14.
[f] 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.
[g] 1 Pet. iii. 15.
[h] 2 Tim. ii. 25.
[i] 2 Cor. xi. 12.

"abstain even from the appearance of evil[k]," and prevent, if possible, his good from being evil spoken of[l]. In a word, where love is in the heart, and "the law of kindness is in the lips," the enemies of religion will be "put to silence, and the mouths of gainsayers be stopped."]

3. With prudence and foresight—

[Solomon observes, "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence[m]." But many seem to think that they have nothing to do with prudence: they have only to follow their own notions of duty, and to leave all consequences to God. Hence they go forward in their own way, and in their own spirit; never once considering, what may be the effect of their conduct on the minds of others: and, though they may do some good, they do more injury than they can well conceive. But if we would behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way, we must consider the probable consequences of our actions[n], and endeavour to accomplish our ends by the most inoffensive means. When Paul went to Jerusalem, where God's design of calling the Gentiles into his Church, and of abrogating the Mosaic ritual, was but imperfectly understood, he took the precaution of conferring privately with the leading members of that Church in the first instance[o], in order to explain his views to them, and through them to remove the prejudices of the people at large. This was wise; and the wisdom of it appeared in the effects which followed. Similar precautions should be used by us in all our commerce with the world at large, or with the Church in particular: we should "give no unnecessary offence either to the Jew, or to the Greek, or to the Church of God." We should consider what every one can bear; and should suit ourselves to his capacity or condition. Our blessed Lord himself set us this example, speaking every thing in a way of parables, according as his auditors were able to receive it[p]. St. Paul also administered "milk or strong meat" to his converts, according as the measure of their proficiency required[q]. And we also are taught to act under the influence of the same principle, towards all whom we may have occasion to address; "not casting our pearls before swine," "nor pouring new wine into old bottles," but accommodating our instructions to the necessities and dispositions of all who hear us. In a word, "I would," as St. Paul says, "have you wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning evil[r]."]

4. With disinterestedness and simplicity—

There is a carnal wisdom, which operates in a way of craft and cunning: but this is directly opposed to "the wisdom that is from above," which consists in simplicity and godly sincerity. It

[k] 1 Thess. v. 22.
[l] Rom. xiv. 16.
[m] Prov. viii. 12.
[n] Eccl. viii. 5.
[o] Gal. ii. 2.
[p] Mark iv. 33.
[q] 1 Cor. iii. 2.
[r] Rom. xvi. 19.

"It is *this*, and this alone, that proceeds from the grace of God, and under the influence of which we are to have our conversation in the world[s]." If there be any selfish objects proposed, any sinister motives indulged, any artifices practised by us, we are far from true wisdom: true wisdom disclaims every thing that is disingenuous. Its eye is single, its object pure, its operation lucid, uniform, irreprehensible. It will bear the light: it will shine the brightest, where it is brought most to view. If it make us "wise as serpents, it will keep us harmless as doves[t]." Every measure of deceit must be banished; all falsehood, either in word or deed, abhorred; and truth and equity must stand confessed in the whole of our dealings. This is true wisdom; and, "whosoever walks according to this rule, peace shall be upon him, and mercy, even upon all the Israel of God[u]."]

We conclude with one or two DIRECTIONS for the attainment and increase of this wisdom:

1. Let a conformity to its dictates be your constant aim—

["The wisdom of the prudent is, to understand his way[uu]." If we walk at random, and without a due consideration of our ways, we never shall attain any true wisdom. We must be aware that folly is bound up in our hearts, and that we are constantly liable to err. We must take our rule of action from the unerring words of truth. We must measure our sentiments and actions by that rule. We must in particular set the Lord Jesus Christ before us, and endeavour to drink into his spirit, and to walk in his steps. This must be our constant habit. Whether our actions be more or less important, they must all be referred to this standard, and be regulated by this principle. Then we shall gradually have our minds enlightened: we shall see with increasing evidence our former deviations from the right path. We shall see, how erroneously we judged on many occasions; and how unwisely we acted, whilst yet we thought that we were acting right. Thus our judgment will be matured; our consciences be preserved tender; and our ways be conformed to the perfect will of God. "Who then is wise and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom[x]."]

2. Pray earnestly to God to inspire you with it—

[It is "the Lord alone that giveth wisdom[xx]:" and to him David directed his supplications, in the words of our text, "O when wilt thou come unto me?" David felt his insufficiency for that great work which lay before him; and he panted after an increase of grace to fit him for it. Thus should we pant after the influences

[s] 2 Cor. i. 12. [t] Matt. x. 16. [u] Gal. vi. 16.
[w] Prov. xiv. 8. [x] Jam. iii. 13. [xx] Prov. ii. 6.

ences of the Holy Spirit, to "open the eyes of our understanding," and to "guide us into all truth." Without the aid of the Holy Spirit we cannot hope to fill up our several stations in life with true wisdom. David, as a monarch, felt his need of Divine aid to execute the resolution he had formed. Solomon desired this aid beyond either riches or honour: and God, in answer to his prayer, "gave him a wise and understanding heart," above all the children of men. As Ministers of God's word, we need the same: for St. Paul says, in reference to the Ministry, "who is sufficient for these things?" The same must be said by us in every station and relation of life. We all have our own peculiar duties to perform; and wisdom consists in executing *them* aright. Let this never be forgotten, that our chief wisdom consists in ascertaining with precision, and performing with punctuality, *the duties of our own particular situation.* It is not by going out of our own proper line, but by filling our own particular station well, that we shall approve ourselves truly wise. Let parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, bear this in mind: let none learn to their own understanding[y]," but all with one heart address to God this necessary petition, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness[z]!"]

[y] Prov. iii. 5. [z] See the text in the Prayer-book Translation.

## CCCCIV.

### THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Ps. cii. 13—15. *Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come: for thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.*

AMIDST all the personal afflictions with which a Child of God can be encompassed, he will be filled with consolation, if he hear glad tidings concerning Zion. The interests of God and the welfare of mankind are nearer to his heart than any of the concerns of time and sense. Hence Paul, when complaining that he "suffered trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds," consoled himself with this, that "the word of God was not bound[a]:" yea, his very bonds themselves were an occasion of joy to his soul, when he saw that they were overruled for the establishment

[a] 2 Tim. ii. 9.

ment of Believers, and the augmentation of the Church of God[b]. Thus, in the psalm before us, the writer, whether speaking in his own person, or personating the Church of God, was in a most disconsolate condition[c]; ——— but the thought of God's speedy interposition for his Church and people comforted him. He saw Jerusalem lying in ruins; but he felt assured that the time was near at hand, when it should be rebuilt, and God's glory be manifested in it as in the days of old. To the Gospel Church also he had a further reference in his own mind; for though the restoration of the Jews from Babylon attracted some attention from the neighbouring States, it was far from being attended with those effects which are here foretold as following from their yet future restoration to their own land, and their final union with the Church of Christ[d].

In considering this event, we shall notice,

I. The time fixed for it—

God most assuredly has mercy in store for Zion—

[The Jews shall not always continue in their present degraded state: they shall be gathered from every quarter of the globe, and be brought back again to their own land. We must almost cease to assign any determinate meaning to words, if we explain in a figurative sense only the numberless declarations of God on this subject[e] ——— As to their restoration to the Divine favour, it is impossible for any one who believes the Scriptures to doubt of it. Though God is angry with them, he has not cast them off for ever. There is yet among them "a remnant according to the election of grace," who shall be again engrafted on their own olive-tree, and enjoy all the riches of the Gospel salvation[f] ———]

For the conferring of "these favours," there is a time fixed in the Divine counsels—

["Known unto God are all things from the foundation of the world:" and every thing that is "done, is done according to his determinate counsel and fore-knowledge[g]." The deliverance of the Jews from Egypt was foretold to Abraham four hundred and

[b] Phil. i. 12—18. [c] ver. 3—11.

[d] That the writer looks forward to that period, will appear by comparing ver. 25—27. with Heb. i. 10—12.

[e] Ezek. xxviii. 25, 26. & xxxvii. 1—28.

[f] Rom. xi. 5. 25, 26. [g] Acts ii. 23. & iv. 28.

and thirty years before it took place; and it was accomplished *on the self-same day* that had been then fixed[h]. In like manner, their deliverance from Babylon was fixed; nor were they detained one hour there beyond the seventy years that had been assigned for their captivity[i]. Thus is the period fixed for their present dispersion. It is to terminate one thousand two hundred and sixty years after the establishment of the Papal tyranny and of the Mahometan delusion. Other thirty years are added to that time for the completing of that glorious work, and forty-five more for the full introduction of the Millennium, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[k]. Respecting the exact time from whence these several periods must be dated, Commentators are not agreed; nor is it our intention to enter into that part of the question: we only mention these things to shew, that "God has reserved the times and the seasons in his own power," and that the time for the future restoration of the Jews is as determinately fixed in the Divine counsels, as any other event that ever occurred.]

We think too that we may already see,

II. The signs of its approach—

When our blessed Lord came to establish his kingdom upon earth, there were many signs whereby a candid observer might ascertain that he was really come[l]. An expectation of him had prevailed both among Jews and Gentiles[m]: his forerunner, John the Baptist, had come to prepare his way[n]: and his own miracles had evinced, that he was indeed the person whom he professed to be[o]. Thus the Psalmist intimates that there are signs, whereby the future manifestations of his love and mercy to his people Israel shall be discerned, previous to their full accomplishment: "The time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come; *for* thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof." We say then that the approach of that blessed period is now evidently marked by,

1. The concern that is now felt for the Jewish people—

[How

[h] Exod. xii. 41. [i] Jer. xxv. 12. & xxix. 10.
[k] Dan. vii. 25. & xii. 7, 11, 12. with Rev. xi. 3, 15. & xii. 6, 14. & xiii. 5. [l] Matt. xvi. 3.
[m] Luke ii. 25, 38. [n] Matt. xvii. 9—13. [o] John v. 36.

[How many centuries have passed without any efforts made for their conversion to the faith of Christ! They have been regarded by the Christian world as utterly unworthy of notice; or rather, have been treated by them with all manner of indignity, oppression, and cruelty. But now Christians begin to feel how basely they have acted towards them; and are combining their efforts to rend the veil from their hearts! and by all possible means to lead them to the knowledge of that Messiah, whom their fathers crucified[o] ———]

2. The expectation which the Jews have of their approaching deliverance—

[The Jews even of our own country, and still more upon the Continent, have a persuasion that their Messiah is speedily to appear, and to vindicate them from the oppression which they have so long experienced[p]. And though they do not at present know what kind of blessings they are destined to enjoy, (for they look no further than to a temporal deliverance,) yet the circumstance of their "looking for redemption" as fast approaching, may justly be regarded as a sign of its actual approach.]

3. The work that has already been effected among them—

[Many have been converted to the faith of Christ: and though, as in the first ages of Christianity, many have dishonoured, or renounced, their holy profession, yet many have held fast their faith amidst the heaviest trials, and have adorned the Gospel by a holy conversation. We cannot, it is true, boast of thousands converted at once; nor were the efforts of John, and of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, very successful for a season: even after all the labours and miracles of our Lord, his Disciples amounted only to 500; the greatest part of those who were convinced by him for a season having gone back from him: but the seed sown by him grew up on the day of Pentecost, and brought forth fruit an hundred-fold: in like manner we have only fruit sufficient at present to encourage our continued exertions; but we hope that Pentecostal fruits will yet be found, and *that* too at no distant period. At all events we have evidence enough to shew, that God is with us in our labours of love, and to assure us, that we shall not labour in vain, or run in vain. The very circumstance of so many heralds being stirred up to prepare their way, is a strong ground of hope, that ere long "the valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains and hills be made

[o] The attention paid to the study of prophecy in this day is remarkable.

[p] Persons conversant with India have assured us, that both Mahometans and Hindoos have an expectation also that a great change is about to take place in the religions which they profess.

made low, and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together[q]."]

Nor are we left in uncertainty about,

III. The effects of its arrival—

To the Jews themselves the effects will be glorious—

[Such prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, will they enjoy, as was but faintly typified in the days of Solomon——— "The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[r]"———]

To the Gentiles also it will be the commencement of inconceivable and universal happiness—

[*This is particularly marked in our text;* "So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord:" yes, the restoration and conversion of the Jews will be "as life from the dead" to the whole Gentile world[s]. Their deliverances from Egypt and from Babylon attracted the attention of the nations which were round about them; but this deliverance will fill with surprise and astonishment all the nations upon earth; for the Jews are scattered through every country under heaven: and in every country there will be a simultaneous motion of the Jews towards their own land, and a turning to that Saviour, whom now they hate. This will carry conviction to the minds of all, that Jesus is the true Messiah, the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of the whole world. Then will all the great ones of the earth, the highest kings, no less than their meanest subjects, behold the glory of God in the face of our adorable Saviour; and all, both Jews and Gentiles, become one fold under one Shepherd[t]——— However incredible this may appear, it shall assuredly be effected in due season; for the Lord hath promised; and not a jot or tittle of his word shall fail.]

ADDRESS,

1. Have compassion upon Zion—

[See how deplorable is the present state of God's antient people: compare it with the former periods of their history when they were so signally honoured with the presence of their God in the wilderness, and at Sinai, and in the days of David and Solomon——— Shall not the contrast fill you with pity and compassion?

[q] Isai. xl. 3—5. [r] Isai. xxx. 26. [s] Rom. xi. 12, 15.
[t] See Isai. lx. 1—8, 10—14. Ps. lxxii. 8—11, 16—19. Zech. ii. 10—12. & viii. 20—23. & xiv. 9.

compassion? Methinks you can scarcely have the feelings of *men*, much less of *Christians*, if you do not weep over their forlorn and destitute condition. See how Nehemiah felt the desolations of Zion in his day[u]! — — — and is there not yet greater occasion for you to do so now? See how Daniel set himself to implore mercy for his brethren, encouraged by the near approach of the time destined for their deliverance[x] — — — And let the prospect we have of an infinitely greater deliverance for them, stimulate you to similar exertions in their behalf. Let nothing be wanting on your part that can contribute to their good. Your time, your money, your influence will be well employed in so glorious a cause: and be assured that in endeavouring to "water others, you shall be watered yourselves."]

2. Seek to experience the good work in your own souls—

[We would not so draw your attention to the vineyard of others, as to divert it from your own. If it be desirable for the Jews to "fear the name of the Lord, and to behold his glory," it is surely no less desirable for you also. Brethren, this charity must begin at home. It will be a fearful thing to "preach to others, and to become a cast-away ourselves." Begin then, every one of you, to seek the favour of God to your own souls. Truly it is lamentable to see in what a state our Christian Zion is: and how many amongst us differ little from the Jews, except in name and profession. And in this we are far more guilty than they, because, whilst they are misled through the blindness that is come upon them, we sin against light and knowledge, and, Judas-like, betray the Saviour whom we profess to love. Let us hope, however, that the time for God to favour us is come; (O that it may be come, and that our eyes may see it!) and that the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, shall be speedily reared amongst us, to the glory of God, and to the salvation of many souls. Much as we desire your aid for the Jewish nation, our first desire is, that you yourselves may be saved. In this we are sanctioned by the apostle Paul, who, whilst he pitied the Gentile world, desired to be accursed from Christ, if it might but be instrumental to the saving of his brethren the Jews. To you then, Brethren, we say, *First* give your own selves to the Lord, and *afterwards* to us, by the will of God[y] — — —]

[u] Neh. ii. 2, 3. [x] Dan. ix. 2, 3. [y] 2 Cor. viii. 5.

## CCCCV.

### THE ETERNITY AND IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST.

Ps. cii. 25—28. *Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

AMONGST all the Psalms, there is none more full of mourning and lamentation than this: but whether the Psalmist speaks in his own person, or in the person of the Church which was in the most desolate condition, is not certain. But though written at the return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, and referring primarily to the restoration of the Jewish Church and polity, it evidently has respect to the Messiah and the establishment of his Church on the face of the whole earth; since it is said, that "the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory[a]." Indeed the words of our text are expressly applied to Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and are adduced to shew the infinite superiority of Christ above all the hosts of heaven[b]. With this infallible guide to direct us, we proceed to point out,

I. The perfections of Christ—

The description here given of our Lord Jesus Christ proves beyond all doubt his proper Deity. Observe,

1. His eternity—

[He it was who made the universe: the highest angels derived their existence from his all-creating hand[c]. "All things were created, not only *by* him, but *for* him[d]:" which could not be, if he himself were a creature. Suppose him ever so high above all other creatures, if he himself was a creature, he could not have created *all things*, seeing he himself must have been created by another. But he was the eternal God: "he was with God, and was God: and *without him was not any thing made that was made*[e]." Yes, that adorable Saviour who at the appointed

[a] ver. 15.
[b] Heb. i. 10—12.
[c] Col. i. 16.
[d] ib. ver. 17.
[e] John i. 1—3.

appointed season assumed our flesh at Bethlehem, was the eternal God; "his goings forth were of old, from everlasting[f]."]

2. His immutability—

[The material creation is formed only as a theatre for the display of the Creator's glory: and, when it shall have answered its destined end, it will be destroyed by fire[g]: the Creator will dissolve it with as much ease as a man "folds up a garment" for which he has no farther use. But the Lord Jesus Christ will exist for ever. As he is the eternal, so is he the immutable Jehovah: "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever[h]."]

Not to dwell on a point which requires neither confirmation nor discussion: we proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. The aspect of those perfections on the welfare of the Church—

In the verse before the text, the Psalmist may be speaking personally of himself, just as Hezekiah did when apprehensive of speedy dissolution[i]: but in the close of the psalm he indisputably speaks of the Church: and represents as depending upon Christ,

1. The stability of the Church at large—

[The seed here mentioned are the Church of God, the company of the faithful in every age[k]. It might be supposed that these, surrounded as they are by enemies on every side, must be utterly destroyed: and, in fact, the Church has at times been reduced so low, as scarcely to have, except in name, any existence upon earth. But our Lord has founded it upon a rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Other things, however stable in appearance, shall vanish away: but this shall stand for ever and ever[l]. The different individuals are successively removed by death: but children shall be born to God through the instrumentality of his Gospel, and the Church "continue" to the end of time.]

2. The final salvation of every true Believer—

[It is a miracle, considering what difficulties the Believer has to encounter, and how unable he is of himself to do even the least thing that is good, that any one should finally attain the promised inheritance. But Jesus lives, and therefore all who trust in him shall live also. In his word he is as immutable as in

[f] Mic. v. 2. The same truth is generally supposed to be declared in Prov. viii. 22—31.
[g] 2 Pet. iii. 10, 12. [h] Heb. xiii. 8. Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.
[k] Ps. lxix. 36. [l] Isai. li. 6.

in his essence: and "of that word not one jot or tittle shall ever fail." "Never will he leave them; never, never will he forsake them." "He is able to keep them from falling;" and, "Of those whom the Father has given him will he lose none."]

IMPROVEMENT—

Is there amongst you any tempted soul?

[Methinks some may be in the state of the Psalmist, "eating ashes like bread, and mingling their drink with tears"———. But let not any one be so bowed down with his afflictions, as to say, "There is no hope." Whilst your Redeemer lives, you have a sure refuge: and, whatever trials you may have to sustain, "his grace shall be sufficient for you" ———]

To those who are maintaining their stedfastness in the Gospel—

[We would say, Remember to whom you are indebted for your stability: "He that hath wrought you to this self-same thing is God." O think, what had been your state times without number, if your Almighty Saviour had not interposed to rescue you from the jaws of that roaring lion that seeketh to devour you———and let all your confidence be in him alone———]

## CCCCVI.

### DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. ciii. 1—5. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases: who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy strength is renewed like the eagle's.*

IT is a favourite opinion of some divines, that we are bound to love God for his own perfections, without having any respect to the benefits which we receive from him. But this appears to us to be an unscriptural refinement. That God *deserves* all possible love from his creatures on account of his own perfections, can admit of no doubt: and we can easily conceive, that persons may be so occupied with an admiration of his perfections, as not to have in their minds any distinct reference to the benefits they

they have received from him: but that any creature can place himself in the situation of a being who has no obligations to God for past mercies, and no expectation of future blessings from him, we very much doubt: nor are we aware that God any where requires us so to divest ourselves of all the feelings of humanity, for the sake of engaging more entirely in the contemplation of his perfections. Nor indeed can we consent to the idea, that gratitude is so low a virtue[a]. On the contrary, it seems to be the principle that animates all the hosts of the redeemed in heaven; who are incessantly occupied in singing praises to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood. By this also all the most eminent saints on earth have been distinguished. In proof of this, we need go no further than to the psalm before us, wherein the man after God's own heart adores and magnifies his Benefactor, for some particular mercies recently vouchsafed unto him. To instil this principle into your minds, and to lead you to a measure of that devotion with which the sweet singer of Israel was inspired, we shall,

I. State the grounds we have to praise God—

To enumerate all the benefits we have received from God, would be impossible. We must content ourselves with adverting to them in the peculiar view in which they are set before us in the text. We would call you then to consider,

1. The freeness and undeservedness of them—

[It is this which gives a zest to every blessing we enjoy: in this view, the very food we eat, and the air we breathe, demand our most grateful acknowledgments. The Psalmist begins with speaking of himself as a guilty and corrupt creature, who, unless pardoned and renewed by the grace of God, must have been an everlasting monument of his righteous displeasure. The same thought also should be uppermost in our minds. We should contrast our state with that of the fallen angels, who never had a Saviour vouchsafed unto them; and with that of the unbelieving world, who, in consequence of rejecting the Saviour, have perished in their sins. What claim had we, any more

[a] Deut. xxviii. 47.

more than the fallen angels? and, if we had been dealt with according to our deserts, where would have been the difference between us and those who are gone beyond the reach of mercy? Let us but contemplate this, and the smallest mercy we enjoy will appear exceeding great; yea, any thing short of hell will be esteemed a mercy[aa].]

2. The richness and variety—

[The psalm primarily relates to David's recovery from some heavy disorder: and the terms wherein he expresses his gratitude are precisely such as are used by other persons on similar occasions[b]. On this account, in our review of God's mercies, it will be proper first to notice the blessings of his *providence*. How often have we been visited with some bodily disorder, which, for ought we know, has been sent as a preventive or punishment of sin! (We certainly have reason to think, that at this time, as well as in former ages, God punishes the sins of his people in this world, that they may not be condemned in the world to come[c].) And how often have we been raised from a state of weakness and danger, to renewed life and vigour! At all events, we have been beset with dangers, and yet not permitted to fall a sacrifice to them; and been encompassed with wants, which have been liberally supplied. Can we view all these mercies with indifference? do they not demand from us a tribute of praise?

But the expressions in the text leads us to contemplate also the blessings of God's *grace*. And can we adopt the words in this view? O how great and wonderful are they, if we appreciate them aright! To be forgiven one sin is a mercy of inconceivable magnitude; but to be forgiven *all*, all that we have ever committed, this is a mercy which neither the tongues of men nor angels can ever adequately declare. Think too of the corruptions which with most inveterate malignity infect our souls: to have these healed! to have them *all* healed! We no longer wonder at the ardour of the Psalmist's devotion; we wonder only at our own stupidity. Contemplate moreover the efforts which Satan, that roaring lion, is ever making to destroy us; consider his wiles, his deceits, his fiery darts: what a stupendous mercy is it that we have not been given up as a prey unto his teeth! Look around at the mercies of all kinds with which we are *encircled*: and mark the provision of ordinances, and promises, yea, of the body and blood of God's only dear Son, with which our souls are nourished and renewed; so that our drooping spirits, like the eagle when renewed in its plumage, are enabled to soar to the highest heavens with confidence and joy. Can we find

[aa] See how this consideration enhanced the favours which God vouchsafed to David, Ps. viii. 1. & St. Paul, Eph. iii. 8.

[b] Isai. xxxviii. 17.

[c] Compare 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32. with Jam. v. 15.

find in these things no grounds of praise? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant itself, if they do not melt at the contemplation of such mercies as these?]

3. The constancy and continuance—

[See how triumphantly the Psalmist dwells on this[d]; and let us compare our experience with his. Has not God made *us* also the objects of his *providential care*, by day and by night, from the earliest period of our existence to this present moment? Has he not also renewed to us every day and hour *the blessings of his grace*, "watering us as his garden," and "encompassing us with his favour as with a shield?" Surely we may say that "goodness and mercy have followed us all our days;" there has not been one single moment when our Divine keeper has ever slumbered or slept; he has kept us "even as the apple of his eye;" "lest any should hurt us, he has kept us day and night."

Say now, what are the feelings which such mercies should generate in our souls; and what are the returns which we ought to make to our heavenly Benefactor?]

Not doubting but that all of you must acknowledge your obligation to praise God, we will, as God shall enable us,

II. Stir you up to the performance of this duty—

It is the office of your Minister to stir up your pure minds "by way of remembrance," yea, "to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." We therefore call upon you to praise God,

1. Individually—

[This is not the duty of Ministers only, but of all, whatever be their age, situation, or condition in life: every one is unspeakably indebted to God; and therefore every one should say for himself, "Bless the Lord, O *my* soul!"

If any object, that they have never yet been made partakers of the blessings of Divine grace, we answer, That you have not on this account the less reason to bless God; for the very "long-suffering of God should be accounted by you as salvation;" and if you compare your state (as yet on mercy's ground) with that of those who have been cut off in their sins, you will see that all the thanks which you can possibly render unto God, are infinitely less than what he deserves at your hands.

Moreover, if you have received no signal deliverances from sickness or danger, you have the more reason to adore your God, who

[d] Forgive*th*, heale*th*, redeeme*th*, crowne*th*, satisfie*th*.

who has preserved you so long in the uninterrupted enjoyment of health and peace.]

2. Fervently—

Praise is not a service for the lip and knee, but of the warmest affections of the soul. The "*soul, and all that is within you,*" should be exerscised in this blessed work. As you are to "love God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength," so also are you to bless him with all your faculties and powers. You must not however mistake vociferation, and talkativeness, and bodily fervour, for devotion; your expressions of gratitude, even when most elevated and joyous, must resemble those which are used among the heavenly hosts; who "veil their faces and their feet," or "cast their crowns at the feet" of their adorable Redeemer. Not to bless him *in this manner*, is constructively and really to "*forget* the benefits" you have received from him; yea, an utter forgetfulness of them were less criminal than such an ungrateful remembrance.]

3. Incessantly—

["Bless, bless, bless the Lord!" says the Psalmist to his soul; shewing thereby that he would have that to be the continual exercise of his mind. Thus should we also labour to have our minds in a constant readiness for this glorious work. We need not indeed be always engaged in the *act* of praise; for we have many other acts in which a great part of our time must be occupied: but the *frame of our minds* should always be disposed for this duty, so as to be ready for it whensoever occasion may call for the performance of it. That we shall feel backwardness to it at times, must be expected: the Psalmist intimates as much, by so *repeatedly urging* his reluctant soul to this duty. But let us follow his example, and urge our souls, however reluctant, to this blessed work. Let us say with him, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; bless him, bless his holy name!" or, like Deborah, "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song."

Thus to bless God is our privilege on earth: thus to bless him is an antepast of heaven.]

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## CCCCVII.

### PERPETUITY OF GOD'S MERCY.

Ps. ciii. 15—18. *As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness upon children's children;*

*children; to such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.*

THE consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of human life is at all times seasonable, and more especially on such an occasion as this[a]; when, &c. ——— If indeed we had no hope beyond the grave, such a subject would be most gloomy and appalling: but when connected, as in the passage before us, with the unbounded mercy of our God, it is full of consolation to all who are looking forward to the eternal world. But we must have a good hope that we shall be partakers of God's mercy, or else not even the glorious description which is here given of it will divest death of its sting, or reconcile us to the thought of approaching dissolution. Let us then from these words consider,

I. The character of God's people—

In general terms they are represented as "fearing God." This of itself would be sufficient to distinguish them from all other people, more especially as it marks "the spirit of their minds." A humble sense of his presence, a dread of doing any thing contrary to his will, and a filial desire to please him, universally distinguish his children: but still they are more clearly discerned by the characters assigned to them in our text:

1. They "keep God's covenant"—

[This is the covenant which was made with Abraham[b]; and of which Christ is the Surety: he has undertaken to accomplish every thing for his believing people; to expiate their sins by his blood, and to renew their souls by his grace ——— "It is ordered in all things and sure[c]" ——— This the Believer sees to be exactly suited to his necessities, in that it provides every thing for him, and only requires that he receive thankfully what is thus offered to him freely. This therefore he embraces: "He lays hold on it" as all his hope: and he relies upon it with his whole heart ——— ]

2. They "do his commandments"—

[They are not negligent of good works, though they do not rely

[a] The occasion may be stated as for *a Funeral*, or on *New Year's Day*.
[b] Gal. iii. 16, 17. [c] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

rely upon them for their justification before God: "they love God's law," which is written in their hearts: and they treasure up in their minds his precepts, no less than his promises. To do the will of God, to do it universally without exception, and constantly without intermission, is the one desire of their hearts. They would gladly, if it were possible, "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God," being "holy, as God is holy," and "perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

Such are the objects of God's love: but how shall we express,

II. The extent of his mercy towards them—

The mercy of God is the great subject of this psalm. In the foregoing verses it is set forth *in a way of comparison*; (equalling the boundless extent of heaven;) but in the words before us it is declared *in a way of contrast* with the transitoriness of man's existence upon earth.

Man's existence here is only as the flower of the field—

[It was "but yesterday" that we grew up; and to-morrow "our place will no more be found." If suffered to continue for a while, we are only ripening for the scythe; but a burning sun, or blasting wind, may cut short our existence in an hour[d]. And when once the flower of the grass is withered, all remembrance of it is gone: and so it is with us: we look gay and flourish for a little moment; and then pass away, and give place to other generations.]

But "the mercy of God towards his people is from everlasting to everlasting"—

[As to its *origin*, it existed from all eternity. It is not excited in the bosom of our God by any thing that he sees in man: neither the misery of our fallen state, nor any goodness which we may be supposed to manifest, move him to exercise a disposition that was not antecedently conceived in his own mind. Both his determination to exercise mercy, and the objects towards whom it should be exercised, were from all eternity fixed in his own bosom[e]. His people are chosen by him, not because they *are* holy, or *will be* holy, but that they "*may be* holy, and without blame before him in love[f]." "He loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn them[g]."

In its *duration* also it is everlasting. "If he have begun a good

[d] Jam. i. 10, 11.
[e] Eph. iii. 11. 2 Tim. i. 9.
[f] Eph. i. 4—6.
[g] Jer. xxxi. 3.

good work in them, we may be confident that he will carry it on[h]." As, on the one hand, he will not depart from them, so, on the other hand, "he will put his fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from him[i]." If at any time they transgress against him, he will chastise them with the rod, till he has brought them back to himself: but "his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them[k]:" for "his gifts and callings are without repentance[l]." In every age will he prove faithful to his promises, even "to all posterities for evermore."

[This doctrine is thought by many to encourage a presumptuous confidence, and a consequent neglect of holiness. But, if we only bear in mind the statement before given of the character of God's people, and our unequivocal declaration, that no person who does not answer to that character can have any Scriptural hope of mercy, we shall see, that there is no occasion for jealousy on that head. The holiness of man is secured by the irreversible decree of Heaven, that the end shall be combined with the means; and that every one whom God has ordained unto life, shall be "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." We need not be afraid to give unto God all the glory of our salvation, and to ascribe all to the operation of his sovereign grace, since, whatever may be said of God's decrees, it is an infallible truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."]

Let us learn from hence,

1. In what light we should view our present state of existence—

[We should learn from nature, and from every thing we see around us. Let all, and the young especially, look, not at the grass merely, but at the flower of the grass, and learn from that how transient their life is[m] ——— And let none, like the fool in the Gospel, promise themselves years, when, for ought they know, this very night their souls may be required of them.]

2. In what way we should improve it—

[What have we to do, but to attain the character of God's people, and to secure the mercy which he will exercise towards them? ——— In comparison of this, all earthly pursuits are vanity; since, transient as our life is, we may yet find the objects of our fondest regard still more transient[n].]

[h] Phil. i. 6. [i] Jer. xxxii. 40. [k] Ps. lxxxix. 30—36. [l] Rom. xi. 29.

[m] Isai. xl. 6—8. This would be proper to insist on, if it were the *funeral of a young person.*

[n] If this were a *Funeral Sermon* for an eminently *pious* person, his views and conduct might with propriety be stated here.

## CCCCVIII.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE.

Ps. cvi. 4, 5. *Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance!*

THE Psalms, though in many parts historical, doctrinal, and preceptive, may yet be considered as differing materially from the rest of the Inspired Volume, inasmuch as while other books of Scripture inculcate religion, these exemplify its operations on the heart.

The words before us express the fervent desires of David's heart; and give occasion for observing, that,

I. The lot of God's people is truly desirable—

God "bears a peculiar favour" towards them—

[He esteems them as "his chosen," "his people," "his inheritance[a];" and shews the same tender regard towards them as he did towards Israel of old; guiding, protecting, and even bearing them as on eagles' wings[b]. Hence that congratulation given them by Moses, a congratulation applicable to them in every age and place[c].]

He gives them to enjoy the truest "good"—

[The enemies of God often possess the greatest share of this world's goods[d]: but his own people have that which is really good[e], and which shall endure when all sublunary things are come to an end[f]. He "visits them with salvation," which comprehends every solid good, whether for soul or body, whether for time or eternity.]

He fills them with "gladness" and holy "glorying"—

[They are not indeed always joyful, because they have much, both within and without, which may well occasionally produce sorrow[g]: but they have seasons of joy, and sometimes are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable[h]. Even in the midst of tribulations they can often glory[i], and shew to all around them, that they have supports and consolations which the world can neither

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [b] Deut. xxxii. 9—13. Isai. lxiii. 9. [e] Isai. lv. 2.
[c] Deut. xxxiii. 29. [d] Ps. xvii. 14. & lxxiii. 7. [h] ib. 8.
[f] Prov. viii. 18. [g] 1 Pet. i. 6.
[i] Rom. v. 3.

neither give nor take away[k]. But what gladness and glorying will they have, when all grounds of sorrow shall be finally removed[l]!]

Surely such a state is the most excellent on earth; and therefore,

II. To desire a participation of it, is a laudable ambition—

The fervent petitions in the text were, doubtless, acceptable to God—

[Every man naturally desires his own happiness: nor is this species of self-love ever wrong, except when it leads us to seek the end by improper means. When "salvation" is the object of our wishes, we cannot covet it too earnestly: God himself has taught us to pray for it, and to urge our petitions with an importunity that will take no denial[m]. And the answers which he gave to David[n] and others in the days of old, sufficiently evince, that he is a prayer-hearing God[o], and that "he delighteth in the prayer of the upright[p]."]

Nor can we please God more than by pleading with him after David's example—

[There is nothing so great, but we may freely ask it at the hands of God. Nor is there any thing so peculiar to the saints, but we may ask it *as sinners*, and be certain of obtaining it, provided we ask in humility and faith. Salvation especially, with all its attendant joys and blessings, he is ready to give unto all that call upon him. Let us then beg of him to impart it to us. And let us particularly bear in mind, that we must first be "visited with his salvation," before we can "see the good of his chosen, and glory with his inheritance." It is through the knowledge of Him, as our Saviour and Redeemer, that we are to be made partakers of all other blessings. In vain do we hope to have fellowship with his people in their felicity, unless we first have fellowship with him in his salvation[q].]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who are grasping after this world—

[All persons are apt to think that this world can make them happy: but David and Solomon, who enjoyed all that the world could give them, found all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Let not us then follow the beaten track, but rather aspire after a good that never cloys, an inheritance that never fades[r].]

2. To

[k] Ps. xciv. 19. [l] Isai. xxxv. 10. & lx. 19, 20.
[m] Luke xviii. 1. Ps. lxxxi. 10. Isai. xlv. 11.
[n] Ps. xxxiv. 6. & cxxxviii. 3. [o] Ps. lxv. 2. [p] Prov. xv. 8.
[q] 1 John i. 3. [r] 1 Pet. i. 4.

2. To those who are sincerely, though faintly, pursuing the path assigned them—

[We need not fear a disappointment on account of any unworthiness in ourselves. Let us beg of God to "remember us," and he will remember us. Let us seek "his favour" in Christ Jesus, and he will be ever ready to grant it. Only let us prosecute this end steadily, and without wavering: so shall we attain the object of our desires, and "glory with God's inheritance" for ever and ever.]

## CCCCIX.

### PRAISE TO GOD FOR REDEMPTION.

Ps. cvii. 1—3. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.*

THE intent of this psalm appears to be, not merely to display the providence of God as interposing in all the concerns of men, but especially the goodness of God in vouchsafing to hear the prayers of men, and to grant them deliverance in answer to their supplications. This is illustrated under a variety of interesting images. His interpositions are described in behalf of travellers lost, but conducted home in safety; of prisoners rescued from merited captivity; of persons sick and dying, restored to health; of mariners preserved, and brought to their desired haven. But we must not confine our attention to *temporal* deliverances only; for it is manifest in the very commencement of the psalm that respect is had to the goodness and mercy of God in their most extended operations, and especially in the great work of Redemption: for it is "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south," that he has already gathered his redeemed people[a], and that he will yet gather them into the kingdom of his Messiah[b], even "Shiloh, unto whom shall the gathering of the people

[a] Matt. viii. 11. [b] Isai. xliii. 5, 6. & lvi. 8.

people be[e]." In considering the different images, we shall notice both the temporal and spiritual deliverances which they severally refer to: but at present we shall wave all reference to them, and notice only the great work of Redemption, as set forth in the words before us; wherein we see,

I. The duty of all to give thanks to God—

Consider,

1. The grounds of it—

[Wherever we turn our eyes, we cannot but see that "the Lord is *good*." Survey the heavenly bodies, and contemplate the benefits derived from them: view the earth with its innumerable productions for the good of man: examine your corporeal frame, and think how every part performs its office for the benefit of the whole: above all, reflect on the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, and mark how by them we are elevated above all the rest of the creation, and fitted for an infinitely higher state of existence in the presence of our God: and then say whether we have not reason to proclaim the goodness of our God———

But the "mercy" of our God is yet, if possible, a more stupendous object of admiration; because goodness manifested itself to us in innocence; whereas mercy is exercised towards us under an inconceivable load of guilt. Think how it was displayed to man at first, in promising him a Saviour: think how it wrought in due time, in sending that Saviour into the world, even the eternal Son of God, and in laying all our iniquities on him. Think how it has shewn itself to every individual amongst us, in bearing with all our iniquities, and in following us with offers of a free and full salvation. Think how it has lasted towards the children of men, and how it shall last towards all who embrace its gracious offers. Surely if our minds were affected as they ought to be with this wonderful subject, we should never cease to praise and adore our God———]

2. The duty itself—

["O give thanks unto the Lord" for these things, all of you, old and young, rich and poor, one with another! If there be one amongst us that has not participated in these benefits, we will be content that he shall be silent: but the very circumstance that we are still on mercy's ground is abundant evidence that we have reason to join in one universal song of praise and thanksgiving. Think of the fallen angels, who never had a Saviour provided for them: think of the millions of the human race who never heard of the Saviour that has been provided for them,

[e] Gen. xlix. 10.

them, or that, having heard of him, have been left to perish in a neglect of his salvation: think of these things, and then, if you can, deny your obligations to the goodness and mercy of your God ———]

But let us more especially consider,

II. The peculiar obligations of the Redeemed to do so—

"Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so:" yes, if ye "whom he has delivered out of the hand of the enemy, and gathered to himself," are silent, "the very stones will cry out against you." Think,

1. From whence you have been gathered—

[The remotest ends of the earth are not so far from each other, as ye were from God — — — and in this state ye were led captive by the devil at his will — ———]

2. By what means ye were redeemed—

[It was by the precious blood of God's only dear Son[d] ——— It was also by the effectual working of his power: for he, as a good Shepherd, sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing[e] ———]

3. To what ye are brought—

[As the Lord's redeemed people, ye are brought into a state of peace with God: ye have the privilege of constant communion with him: ye may expect at his hands every blessing which your souls can desire: and ye shall finally possess all the glory and felicity of heaven.

Think now what, in the view of these things, should be the state of *your* minds. If those who have never yet experienced one of these benefits, have yet abundant reason to celebrate the goodness and mercy of their God, have not *ye* much more? O "let the Redeemed of the Lord say so:" let them sing his praises day and night: let them adore him with their whole hearts ———]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet insensible of God's goodness—

[Alas! how great a portion of every assembly are comprehended under this description! ——— Well, know ye then that we require no other proof of your perishing condition. Tell us not from what sins ye are free: we will grant all that ye are pleased to say: but we declare you to be blind, ignorant, base, ungrateful creatures: ye have no hearts to adore your God; and therefore

[d] Eph. ii. 13. [e] Ezek. xxxiv. 12. Luke xv. 5.

therefore if ye die in your present state, ye can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, where the one employment of the blest inhabitants is to sing the praises of redeeming love. If ever ye be truly converted unto God, this new song will be put into your mouths, and be sung by you day and night [f]———]

2. Those who love the blessed work—

[Some there are, and may God increase their number an hundredfold! who delight to bless and praise their God——— Go on then, dearly Beloved, and abound more and more. Though your songs are as yet but faint, they are truly pleasing in the ears of your reconciled God and Father. This song in particular is grateful to him. Mark what notice he took of it when sung by Solomon [g]——So will he come down and fill your souls with his glory——Mark also what honour he put upon it when sung by Jehosaphat [h]——So will he defeat all the confederacies, whether of earth or hell, that may be formed against you——Sing on then with increasing gratitude, even to the end; and soon shall the golden harp be put into your hands, and you shall join with that heavenly choir in that more perfect song in which they all unite, even in singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."]

[f] Ps. xl. 1—3. with Jer. xxxiii. 11. [g] 2 Chron. v. 13.
[h] 2 Chron. xx. 21, 22.

## CCCCX.

### GOD'S LOVE SEEN IN ALL HIS DISPENSATIONS.

Ps. cvii. 43. *Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*

TO know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is the highest privilege and perfection of man. This attainment, infinitely beyond all other, constitutes true wisdom. But to acquire this knowledge, it is necessary that we study well, not the book of Revelation only, but the records also of God's providential dealings with mankind. The Word and works of God mutually reflect light on each other; and the more extensive and accurate our observation is of those things which occur from day to day, the more just will be our apprehension of God's nature and perfections. True indeed it is, that, as far as theory is concerned, we may learn every thing from the Scripture alone: for in the world

world and in the Church we can find only a repetition of those things which are recorded in the Sacred Volume: but a practical sense of God's love is greatly furthered by the constant exhibition of it which may be seen in his dealings with us; so that we may well say with the Psalmist, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

We propose to shew,

I. What those things are which are here presented to our notice—

To enter fully into them, we should distinctly consider the different representations which are here given of God's merciful interposition in behalf of bewildered travellers, incarcerated prisoners, dying invalids, and mariners reduced to the lowest ebb of despondency. But instead of minutely prosecuting those different inquiries[a], we will draw your attention to the two principal points which pervade the whole; namely,

1. The timely succour which he affords to the distressed—

[The instances mentioned in the psalm are only a few out of the numberless interpositions which God vouchsafes to men in distress: but whatever be the trouble from which we are delivered, it is of infinite importance that we see the hand of God both in the trouble itself and in the deliverance from it. There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it must be traced to God as its author. Whether men or devils be the agents, it matters not; they can do nothing without a special license from God himself: and hence, when men had plundered Job of all his possessions, and Satan had destroyed all his children, he equally ascribed the different events to God; "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Thus must we do: we must ascribe nothing to chance, and nothing to the creature, *except as an instrument in the hands of God.* If the folly or malignity of man injure us, or the wisdom or benevolence of man repair the injury, we must look through the second causes, and fix our eyes on God, as the first great Cause of all. If we see not God *in* the dispensations, of

[a] If this subject were used as a *Thanksgiving after a Storm,* or *after a Recovery from Sickness,* the particular circumstances should here be noticed, with an especial reference to that part of the psalm that is proper to the occasion.

of course we shall learn nothing of God *from* them: but if we behold his agency in them, then will our eyes be opened to see his wisdom and goodness also.]

2. His condescending attention to their prayers—

[In all the instances specified in the psalm, God's interpositions are mentioned as answers to prayer: "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." Many, alas! of the prayers which are offered in seasons of difficulty and distress have respect to nothing more than the particular occasion, and are accompanied with no real desire after God: yet even these prayers God often condescends to hear, just as he did the prayers in which Ahab deprecated the judgments denounced against him. But when the prayers proceed from a penitent and contrite heart, and are offered up in the prevailing name of Jesus Christ, God will hear them at all times and under all circumstances. We do not say that the precise thing which may be asked shall certainly be granted; because God may see that, on the whole, *that* would not prove a blessing to the person who asks it: but no prayer that is offered up in faith shall go forth in vain: it shall surely be answered, if not in the way expected or desired, at least in a way that shall ultimately prove most conducive to the good of him that offers it.]

These things being matters of daily occurrence, we shall proceed to mark,

II. The benefit arising from an attentive consideration of them—

From these we shall be led to notice, not merely the agency of God in all the concerns of man, but especially, and above all, his "loving-kindness" also. This will be seen,

1. In the darkest dispensations of his providence—

[God's dearest children are not more exempt from trials than others: on the contrary, they are often most subjected to them. But in this the loving-kindness of God is especially manifest: for by their trials he leads them to more fervent prayer; that prayer brings to them more signal interpositions; and those interpositions fill them with joy, far overbalancing all the troubles they have endured. Let any Child of God look back to his former life, and say, whether the events which once he regarded as the heaviest calamities, have not been overruled for his greatest good? Yes: it is not David only, but every Child of God, that must say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." We may indeed, like Jacob, say for a time, "All these things are against me:" but when we have seen "*the end*" and issue of the dispensation, we shall confess that "the Lord has been pitiful to

us,

us, and of tender mercy[b]." If we view an insulated and individual occurrence, we may be perplexed respecting it; but if we view it in connexion with all that has preceded and followed it, we shall be able to set our seal to the truth of that promise, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." Whatever then be the affliction under which we are suffering, let us never for a moment lose sight of that truth, "Whom the Lord *loveth*, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.]

2. In the most painful operations of his grace—

[The different circumstances adduced for the illustration of God's providence may not unfitly be regarded as images to shadow forth also the operations of his grace. Truly in them we may see the wants and miseries, the helplessness and terrors, of an awakened soul. Who that knows any thing of his own state has not seen himself a wanderer from the ways of God, and perishing for lack of knowledge? Who has not groaned, and bitterly too, under the chains of sin by which he has been tied and bound? Who has not felt his inability to help himself, as much as if he had been dying of an incurable disorder? And who has not seen himself sinking, as it were, into the bottomless abyss, and been almost "at his wit's end," because he saw not how his soul could be saved? We do not mean to intimate, that all converted persons have felt these things in an equal degree: but all have felt them sufficiently to see the suitableness of these images to their own experience. What then shall we say? Does God, in suffering them to be so exercised, mark his displeasure against them? No: it is love, and love alone, that he manifests. Multitudes of others he leaves to follow their own evil ways without fear, and without remorse: but those whom he loves he awakens from their security: he sends his Holy Spirit to convince them of sin; he stirs them up to fervent prayer; and then, in answer to their prayers, he speaks peace to their souls. "Those troubles were not at the time joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."]

ADVICE—

1. View the hand of God in every thing—

[Things may be called great or small by comparison; but, in fact, there is nothing small, when considered in relation to the possible events which may spring from it. The opening of the book precisely in the place where the services of Mordecai to Ahasuerus were recorded, was as much a work of God as any other that is contained in the Sacred Volume[c]: and the circumstances connected with it were of incalculable importance to the whole

[b] Jam. v. 11.

[c] Esth. vi. 1—3.

whole Jewish nation. Let nothing then be accounted small: but receive every thing as *from* God, and endeavour to improve every thing *for* him: and then shall every thing enrich you with wisdom, and inflame your souls with gratitude and love.]

2. Take occasion from every thing to spread your wants before him in prayer—

[The great, the universal remedy, to which we should have recourse, is prayer. Prayer will turn every thing to gold. Whether our trials be of a temporal or spiritual nature, they cannot fail of proving blessings if only they drive us to a throne of grace. The direction of God himself is, that "in every thing we should make our requests known to him: and, on our doing so, we are assured, that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus[d]." "If we call upon him in the time of trouble, he will hear us," and turn all our complaints into praise and thanksgiving.]

3. Give him the glory of all the deliverances you receive—

[On all the different occasions mentioned in the psalm, it is said, "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness!" This is the tribute which all of us are called to pay; and the very end which God proposes to himself, both in our trials and deliverances, is, to make us sensible of his goodness, and to draw forth from us the tribute of a grateful heart. "Whoso offereth him praise, glorifieth him." See to it then that your daily mercies call forth suitable returns of love and gratitude: and thus will you be preparing gradually for that blessed day, when all the mysterious designs of God, which now you could not penetrate, shall be unravelled, and all your sorrows terminate in endless joy.]

[d] Phil. iv. 6, 7.

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## CCCCXI.

### THE PERSON AND OFFICES OF CHRIST.

Ps. cx. 1—7. *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen; he shall fill the*

*the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.*

IN some of the Psalms, David speaks of himself only; in others, of himself and of the Messiah too; but in this, of the Messiah exclusively: not a word is applicable to any one else. The Jews have taken great pains to explain it away: but their attempts are, and ever must be, in vain.

In the first verse, David relates the Father's address to his Son, when "the council of peace was held between them:" and the whole of the remainder is addressed by the Psalmist to the Messiah himself. It altogether elucidates in a very striking manner the character of Christ.

In it are set forth,

I. His person—

It is of great importance that we have just views of the Divinity of Christ—

[On that depends the sufficiency of the atonement which he has offered for the sins of men. If he be only a creature, how can we be assured that the shedding of his blood has any more virtue and efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats? What proportion is there between the transitory sufferings of one creature, and the accumulated sins of all the children of men? How can we conceive that there should be such a value in the blood of any created Being, as to purchase for a ruined world a deliverance from everlasting misery, and a possession of everlasting happiness and glory? But if our Redeemer be God as well as man, then we see at once, that, inasmuch as he is an infinitely glorious Being, there is an infinite merit in his obedience unto death, sufficient to satisfy the demands of law and justice for the sins of all mankind. On any other supposition than that Christ is God, there would be no force at all in that question of the Apostle, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things[a]?" What argument would it be to say, "He that gave us a creature, how shall he not also give us HIMSELF, and all the glory of heaven?" But if Christ be God, equal with the Father, then is the argument clear, obvious, and unanswerable.]

In the psalm before us the divinity of Christ is plainly asserted—

[Our

[a] Rom. viii. 32.

[Our blessed Lord himself appeals to it, in order to confound and silence his malignant adversaries. Both Pharisees and Sadducees had endeavoured to ensnare him by difficult and perplexing questions: and, when he had answered, he put this question to them; "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? and when they said "The son of David," he asked them, "How then doth David in Spirit call him LORD," saying, "The Lord said unto my LORD, &c.? If David then call him LORD, how is he his son?" And then we are told, "No man was able to answer him a word[b]." Had they been willing to acknowledge Christ as their Messiah, they needed not to have been at any loss for an answer: for they knew him to be a son of David; and he had repeatedly declared himself to be God, insomuch that they had again and again taken up stones to stone him for blasphemy. But this passage proved beyond all doubt that the Messiah was to be "the Root, as well as the offspring, of David;" the LORD of David, as well as David's son.

And here it is worthy of notice, that we see in this appeal what was the interpretation which the Jews of that day put upon the psalm before us. *They all understood it as relating to the Messiah:* and all the attempts of modern Jews to put any other construction upon it are futile in the extreme.

But, by comparing the parallel passage in St. Mark, we see what the Jews of that day thought of the doctrine of the Trinity[c]. Our Lord speaks of the Holy Ghost as inspiring David, (which none but Jehovah could do,) to declare what Jehovah the Father had said to Jehovah the Son. If the doctrine of the Trinity had not been received among them, would they have been silent, and not known what to answer him? And would they from this time have been deterred by it from asking him any more questions?

Be it known then, that Christ is very God, and very man: he is that "Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God[d];" "God manifest in the flesh[e]." He is, as the prophet calls him, "the Mighty God[f]," or as St. Paul calls him, "the Great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ[g]," "God over all blessed for ever[h]."]

The Psalmist now addressing himself to the Messiah, proclaims to him the success that should attend him in the execution of all,

II. His offices—

The second and third verses may undoubtedly be applied to his regal office, because they speak of his "ruling in the midst of his enemies:" but, if we consider

[b] Matt. xxii. 41—46. [c] Mark xii. 35—37. [d] John i. 1, 14.
[e] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [f] Isai. ix. 6. [g] Tit. ii. 13. [h] Rom. ix. 5.

sider how his victories are gained, namely, by his word and Spirit, and that it is by the illumination of men's minds that he subdues their hearts, we shall see that this part of the psalm may properly be understood as relating to his prophetic character. Accordingly we behold him here represented as,

1. A Prophet—

[The word is "the rod of his strength," by which he works all the wonders of his grace. In itself it is as weak and inefficient as the rod of Moses, whereby he wrought all his miracles in Egypt; but, as applied by the Spirit of God to the souls of men, it is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and "is mighty to the pulling down of all the strong holds" of sin and Satan: "it is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe[i]." It "came forth from Zion, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem[k]," when it was published by the holy Apostles; who delivered it, as they were commanded, to Jerusalem first, and then to other parts of the world. And there is this remarkable difference between the victories gained by it, and those gained by any carnal weapon: by the latter, men are brought to a reluctant submission; by the former, they are "made willing," truly and cordially willing, to take Christ's yoke upon them. Whenever the Lord's time, the "day of his power," is come, they, like the rams of Nebaioth, present themselves as voluntary sacrifices at God's altar, and give up themselves unreservedly to the Lord[l].

Nor is deliverance from death and hell the only object of their pursuit: they feel, that they can be happy only in the way of holiness; and therefore "in the beauties of holiness" they come unto him: their dispositions and habits are all changed: they abstain from sin, because they hate it; and obey the law, because they love it: and, could they obtain the desire of their hearts, they would be "holy as God is holy," and "perfect, even as their Father in heaven is perfect."

The numbers that shall thus be converted to the Lord exceed all calculation or conception. As the drops of "dew" issuing from "the womb of the morning," so will be the progeny that shall be born to him, innumerable: there may be but "an handful of corn cast on the top of the mountains; but yet shall the fruit be as the woods of Lebanon, and as the piles of grass upon the earth[m]." Thus powerfully did his word and Spirit operate in the early "youth" of the Church; and thus shall they operate to the very end of time: and it is worthy of particular

[i] Rom. i. 16. [k] Isai. ii. 3.

[l] Compare that beautiful passage Isai. lx. 4—8. with Rom. xii. 1. & 2 Cor. viii. 5.

[m] Ps. lxxii. 16.

cular observation, that the very first verse of this psalm, with the explanation given of it by the Apostle, was that which pierced the hearts of our Lord's murderers, and subdued 3000 of them at once to the obedience of faith[n].

David now proceeds to speak of Christ as,]

2. A Priest—

[As Christ was to offer a sacrifice for the sins of his people, he must of necessity be a Priest. But from the Levitical priesthood, which was confined to the tribe of Levi, he was of necessity excluded, because he was of the tribe of Judah. There was however a priesthood of another order, the order of Melchizedec; and to that he was solemnly consecrated with an oath. What this priesthood was, we should never have known, if it had not been explained to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Mosaic history, Melchizedec is briefly mentioned, without any account of his predecessors or successors in his office[o]: and this was particularly overruled by God, in order that he might be a type of Christ, whose priesthood was from everlasting (in the Divine counsels,) and everlastingly to continue in himself alone. Now at the time that the Levitical priesthood was in all its glory, David foretold, that it should be superseded, (and the whole Mosaic economy with it,) by a priesthood of a higher order; a priesthood, which Abraham himself, and all his posterity in him, acknowledged, and which, on account of the solemnity of its appointment, and the perpetuity of its duration, was of a far higher order[p].

Is it inquired, What sacrifice he had to offer? we answer, His own body, which "through the eternal Spirit he offered without spot to God." And, having offered that sacrifice once for all, he now intercedes for us within the veil; and will come again at the end of the world to bless his redeemed people, and to make them partakers of everlasting blessedness.

But it is foretold yet further, that he was also to be,]

3. A King[pp]—

[Melchizedec, though a priest, was a king also, and one that was most eminently fitted to typify the Saviour, being "king of righteousness and peace[q]." Thus was Christ not a priest only, but "a priest upon his throne[r]." Being now exalted to the right hand of God, he "sitteth there, till all his enemies

[n] Acts ii. 34—37. [o] Gen. xiv. 18—20. [p] Read Heb. vii. 1—28.

[pp] Some, to reconcile ver. 5. with ver. 1. suppose that in ver. 5. David ceases to address the Messiah, and directs his speech to the Father. But this introduces needless perplexity into the subject. If we understand "The Lord at thy right hand," as meaning, *The Lord who is thy strength and thy support*, (which is certainly its most obvious meaning,) the whole speech is uninterrupted and clear.

[q] Heb. vii. 2. [r] Zech. vi. 13.

enemies become his footstool." "To him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear" allegiance: or, if any continue to withstand his overtures of mercy, he will smite them to the ground; yea, though they be the greatest monarchs upon earth: "He will strike through kings in the day of his wrath." There is "a day of wrath," as well as a day of mercy; and terrible indeed will be "the wrath of the Lamb." As a mighty conqueror desolates the countries which he overruns, and fills them with the bodies of the slain, so will Jesus in that awful day. If he rule not men by their free consent, as their Lord, he will judge them as rebels, and "wound the heads of all" to the remotest corners of the earth: he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."

Previous to his own victories, he was himself, according to human estimate, to be overcome. But his humiliation was to pave the way for his exaltation: "by death he was to overcome him that had the power of death, and to deliver from death" his ransomed people. This was the way pointed out in the very first proclamation of mercy to fallen man: "The seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head; but the serpent was first to bruise his heel[s]." Accordingly he did "drink of the brook in the way:" he suffered infinitely more than words can express, or the mind of man can conceive; and then "he lifted up the head," and was "exalted far above all principalities and powers," whether of heaven or hell; and he "shall surely reign till all his enemies be put under his feet."]

We cannot IMPROVE this subject better than by asking,

1. What think ye of Christ?

[This is the very question which our Lord himself asked in reference to this psalm. Yet it is not a mere theoretical opinion that we ask for, but the practical persuasion of your hearts. Do you view him with reverence and love as your incarnate God? ——— Do you look to him as your Prophet, to teach and guide you into all truth? ——— Do you look to him as your great High Priest, trusting in his all-atoning sacrifice, and imploring an interest in his prevailing intercession? ——— Do you farther look to him as your King, desiring him to bring, not your actions only, but "your every thought, into captivity" to his sacred will? ——— This is the test whereby you are to try the state of your souls before God; for according to your experience of these things will be your sentence in the day of judgment ———]

2. What measure have ye of resemblance to him?

[God has ordained that all his people should "be conformed to

[s] Gen. iii. 15.

to the image of his Son[t]," in sufferings, in holiness, and in glory. Like him, they must "drink of the brook in the way, and afterwards lift up the head." "The Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through sufferings;" and "all the sons who shall be brought to glory" must be made perfect in the same way[u]: "through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of heaven." The "mortifying of our members upon earth," with "the cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye," are strong and significant expressions, shewing clearly, that a life of godliness requires much painful labour and self-denial. Besides, there is much persecution also to be endured from an ungodly world; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Nor are the conflicts that are to be sustained with all the powers of darkness of small consideration in the Christian's warfare. Let me ask then, Are ye following Christ in this way? Are ye "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts?" Are ye "following him boldly without the camp, bearing his reproach?" Are ye fighting manfully the good fight of faith," and "wrestling, not only with flesh and blood, but with all the principalities and powers of hell?" Be assured that "the kingdom of heaven cannot be taken without violence: the violent must take it by force." The work and offices of Christ will be of no avail in our behalf, if we do not "take up our cross daily and follow him." Awake then, all of you, to the duties that are assigned you; and be content to "suffer with him, that ye may be also glorified together."]

[t] Rom. viii. 29. [u] Heb. ii. 10.

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## CCCCXII.

### THE GREAT WORK OF REDEMPTION.

Ps. cxi. 2. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.*

THIS psalm is one of those appointed by our Church for Easter Day: for which it is sufficiently appropriate, in that it celebrates that redemption of God's people from Egypt, which was typical of the Redemption wrought out for us by Christ upon the cross, and perfected by his resurrection from the dead. The structure of it is very peculiar. Every sentence begins with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet in their order; the eight first verses consisting each of two sentences, and the two last

of

of three sentences. This artificial mode of writing it seems to have been with a view to its being more easily remembered. The first word of it, "Hallelujah," was, in fact, no part of the psalm itself, but only the title of it; and it shews us with what disposition of mind the subject should be contemplated, and with what feelings it was recorded. O that our souls might rise to the occasion, whilst we consider,

I. The greatness of God's works!

Great indeed they were, even the deliverances accomplished for Israel in Egypt. Who can read of all the plagues with which that land was visited; or of the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea; or of the wonders wrought for Israel in the wilderness; or of their final establishment in the land of Canaan; and not exclaim, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!"? But, however much we may be disposed, in imitation of David in this psalm, to admire the perfections of God as illustrated in that stupendous work, we are called to the consideration of infinitely greater works, of which the deliverance from Egypt was but a type and shadow. Yes: in the redemption of the world we do indeed behold the perfections of our God shining forth, as it were, in meridian splendor. *That* was a work beyond all parallel and all conception great,

1. In wisdom and power—

[When Moses saw what God had wrought for the people of Israel at the Red Sea, he sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[a]?" But St. Paul speaks of our blessed Lord as concentrating in himself all that is great and glorious, and as being, as it were in the abstract, "The Wisdom of God, and the Power of God[b]." O what unsearchable depths of wisdom were contained in that mystery, the substitution of God's only dear Son in the place of sinners; whereby the sins of the whole world are expiated, and the kingdom of heaven opened to millions, who, without such a Saviour, must have inherited the blackness of darkness for ever! ——— Nor was the power that effected our redemption less manifest, in forming the human nature

[a] Exod. xv. 11. [b] 1 Cor. i. 24.

nature of our Lord in the womb of a pure Virgin, free from all the taint of our original corruption; and enabling that body, so wonderfully formed, to bear the curse due to our iniquities, and to work out a righteousness adequate to the wants, and sufficient for the necessities, of a ruined world. View the triumphs of Jesus in the wilderness, and in the garden, and on the cross; in all of which "he spoiled the principalities and powers of hell:" view them also in his resurrection, and ascension, and in the operations of the Holy Spirit, whom he sent from heaven to complete the wonders of his grace; view these things, and say, whether "his work be not indeed honourable and glorious[c];" the very summit of wisdom, and the perfection of power.]

2. In goodness and mercy—

[So conspicuous were these perfections in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, that David could behold, as it were, nothing else. In a psalm where he specifies a great variety of particulars relating to it, he repeats no less than twenty-six times in as many verses, "His mercy endureth for ever[d]." But what shall we say of his goodness and mercy to us in Christ Jesus? Eternity will be too short to enumerate the instances wherein these perfections are displayed, and to make such acknowledgments as this exhibition of them calls for at our hands. The manna from heaven, and the water from the rock, were but faint images of what we receive in and from the Lord Jesus Christ. O what supplies of grace, what rich communications of his blessed Spirit, does he impart to us from day to day!——And what forbearance does he exercise towards us!——Well indeed may we say with David, that "goodness and mercy have followed us all our days."]

3. In righteousness and truth—

[In the whole dispensation, whether towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as our representative, or towards us whom he has redeemed, there has not been one single act which was not an act of justice, and an accomplishment of some pre-existing declaration. Were our iniquities laid on the Lord Jesus, and punished in him? Was he, after having expiated those sins, exalted to glory, and seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high? All, as David speaks, "was verity and judgment[e]." In like manner, if we are pardoned, and raised to a participation of his glory, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other[f]." Every threatening denounced against sin has been executed in the person of Christ; and every thing promised to Christ, or to us, is fulfilled, when for Christ's sake we are restored to God's favour, and made heirs of his inheritance——]

Agreeable to this character of God's works is,

II. The

[c] ver. 3. [d] Ps. cxxxvi. 1—26. [e] ver. 7. [f] Ps. lxxxv. 10.

II. The respect paid to them by every true Christian—

The Christian is fitly represented as one "who has pleasure in these works"—

[The generality of mankind have, alas! no pleasure in these works, but rather put away the remembrance of them with abhorrence———But not so the Christian: he regards them with far different sensations. He indeed is not insensible to pleasures of other kinds, provided they be such as may be enjoyed with a good conscience towards God. He may, as a scholar and philosopher, feel delight in intellectual pursuits; and he may, as a member of society, find pleasure in the intercourse of friendship, or the enjoyment of domestic comforts. But, though he lose not his taste for such pleasures, his delight in them is altogether subordinated to higher and more spiritual enjoyments. Whatever he once accounted gain, is now esteemed by him *comparatively* as dross and dung[g]———The wonders of Redeeming Love are on earth, as they will be in heaven, his constant solace, and his song.]

By him they "are sought out" with care and diligence—

[With a view to a more enlarged knowledge of these works, he *reads the holy Scriptures*, searching into them as for hid treasures———He *attends* carefully *on the ministry* of the word, that he may both obtain a further insight into the Gospel, and have a richer experience of it in his soul———*By* constant *meditation also*, and by fervent *prayer*, he dives deeper and deeper into the great mysteries of godliness; musing, as it were, day and night, and crying mightily to God, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" Never does he imagine that he has yet attained. The more enlarged his views become, the more he sees, that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know: and he looks forward with proportionable earnestness to the eternal world, where the veil shall be taken from before his eyes, and he "will see as he is seen," and "know even as he is known."]

ADDRESS—

1. Seek yet more and more this most desirable of all knowledge—

[See with what persevering diligence the philosopher prosecutes the attainment of science———And will not ye, for the acquiring of knowledge wherein eternal life consists, and "which the angels themselves desire to look into?"———]

2. Endea-

[g] Phil. iii. 7, 8.

2. Endeavour more and more to make a suitable improvement of it—

["Hallelujah" stands as the introduction to the contemplations of David. Let all your contemplations lead to, and terminate in, a similar acclamation. Such *will be* the result of all the knowledge which we shall possess in heaven———and such *should* be our improvement of all that we attain on earth———]

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## CCCCXIII.

### THE GREATNESS AND CONDESCENSION OF GOD.

Ps. cxiii. 5—8. *Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.*

VERILY, God is to be praised: "from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, his name" should be glorious: "He is above all blessing and praise." Whether we consider what he is in himself, or what he is to us, we cannot but exclaim, "Who is like unto the Lord?" If men be not filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of him, it is because they know him not, neither contemplate him: but we can scarcely fail of being in some measure suitably impressed with his excellency, if we consider those perfections of his which are set before us in our text:

I. His greatness—

[But how shall we convey any idea of this? If we speak of created things, however great, we can give some kind of statement, which, though very inadequate, will convey a slight notion at least of the subject. However great the disparity between a monarch and a worm, or between the globe and a grain of sand, there is something whereon we may ground a comparison between them, and something to which we may affix tolerably definite ideas. But between the Creator and the creature there is no point of contact. If we attempt to declare his immensity, and say, that in all the boundless regions of space God is every where, and as entirely present in every different spot as if he were no where in the universe besides, what are we the nearer to any just apprehension of him? Our intellect is not capable of conceiving of him aright. Were a peasant told respecting the motions

motions and distances and mutual dependence of the heavenly bodies, how much of it would he understand? It would be far above his comprehension: he could not embrace any part of the system. So, if we presume to speak of the greatness and incomprehensibility of Jehovah, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge:" "it is a knowledge too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it." The sentiments of Zophar on this subject are well worthy of our attention: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea[a]." And Elihu, another of Job's friends, exactly to the same purpose, says, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out[b]." Sometimes indeed God is pleased to give us some little glimpse of his Majesty, light enough, if we may so speak, to make our darkness visible. Thus by the prophet Isaiah he asks, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." He then adds, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him[c]?" The Psalmist also, with exquisite beauty, thus sets forth the glory of his Majesty: "O Lord my God, thou art very great: thou art clothed with honour and majesty: who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain; who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind; who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire[d]." But, after all, what idea does this description give us of him, who "filleth all things," "whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain?" We are altogether at a loss on so mysterious a subject; which therefore we close with that declaration of the Psalmist, "His greatness is unsearchable[e]."]

But though we can add nothing to what is said in the words before our text, "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens," yet we see in this what will serve to illustrate the depth of,

II. His condescension—

["He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven:"

[a] Job xi. 7—9. [b] Job xxxvii. 23.
[c] Isai. xl. 12, 15, 17, 18. [d] Ps. civ. 1—4.
[e] Ps. cxlv. 3.

heaven:" yes, if he deign to cast an eye upon the highest angels and arch-angels, it is an act of infinite condescension: for, intelligent as they are in comparison of us, "he chargeth them with folly;" and pure as heaven itself is in comparison of this earth, it is "not clean in his sight[f]." But He will stoop even to look down on earth, yea and on the meanest and vilest of its inhabitants, provided they do but humble themselves before him. The poor and needy, even in their lowest state, ever have been, and ever shall be, objects of his peculiar regard. Men may be low in *station*, in *character*, and in *spirit*; but he will notice them notwithstanding. The description given us of Lazarus, represents a condition more deplorable than usually falls to the lot of man ——— yet was he set forth as an object of the tenderest compassion to Almighty God. The dying thief may well be adduced as amongst the most degraded of the human race ——— yet did the Saviour honour him with an express and audible assurance, that he should that very day be with him in Paradise. "To the man that is poor and of a contrite spirit" God has promised in a more especial manner to "look, in order to revive and comfort his drooping spirit." Only let a person lie in the dust before God, and sit, like Job, upon the dunghill, from a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness, and God will fly instantly to his relief: "he will raise the poor out of the dust, and lift up the needy out of the dunghill:" nor is there any dignity, however high, to which he will not exalt him: "he will set him among the princes, even with the princes of his people:" yes, he will cause him to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven," and to reign with them in glory for ever and ever.

Perhaps the primary import of our text may be found in the elevation of such men as Saul and David from the lowest offices to the throne of Israel: but in the psalm, as well as in the Song of Hannah from whence it is taken[g], we must undoubtedly look for a higher meaning, even the elevation of an immortal soul from the lowest state of sin and misery to all the glory and felicity of heaven. Would we have a just conception of the change which by the tender mercy of our God shall be wrought on the poor and contrite, we may behold our blessed Lord raised from the grave, to which with unparalleled ignominy he had been committed, and exalted to the right hand of God, above all the principalities and powers both of earth and heaven. Thus will the poor and contrite soul be raised from guilt to peace, from sin to holiness, from the very gates of hell even to the throne of God.]

Does our God so condescend to you? then let me call on you,

1. To

[f] Job iv. 18. & xv. 15. [g] 1 Sam. ii. 8.

1. To adore him—

[Frequently does this expression occur in the holy Scriptures, "O Lord, who is like unto thee?" And continually should the thought be in our minds. It is impossible to know any thing of the condescension and grace of God, and not be lost in wonder and in praise. We say not that livelier emotions of joy are wrong; but they are always to be suspected, if they be not blended with a considerable measure of self-lothing and self-abhorrence. Profound adoration seems to be the proper posture of a redeemed soul. O ye poor, whose *station* is so low that the greater part of your fellow-creatures would scarcely deign to notice you, think what love God has shewn towards you, if he has made you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom [h]———And ye whose *character* has been so degraded as to have almost resembled that of the Corinthian, think what reason you have to adore your God, if it can be said of you as of them, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God[i]." Above all, ye drooping and desponding souls, who once were ready to say, "There is no hope," what thanks can ye give for those rich assurances and consolations which now form a very foretaste of heaven in your souls? And in all these changes, consider chiefly the means which have been used to effect them. It is not by a mere act of mercy that God has wrought these things for you, but by taking on himself your miseries, that ye may be partakers of his glory. To view the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ aright, you must bear in mind, that "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich[k]." Yes: "He was made sin for you, that you might be made the righteousness of God in him[l]." O bless him, praise him, magnify him, and adore him, and let all that is within you bless his holy name.]

2. To trust in him—

[The greatest discouragements of the saints arise from a view of their own unworthiness. But God, if I may so speak, loves to see you in the dust and on the dunghill. The lower you are abased before him, the more he delights to exalt you. He even derives to himself a glory from the very depths to which he condescends for you. Add not then to all your other sins, that most hateful one of limiting his mercy. If your "sins have ever so much abounded, his grace will much more abound," if only you seek it in Christ Jesus, your Mediator and Redeemer. If you attempt to measure God's love and mercy by any created standard, you must of necessity dishonour him exceedingly: for there is nothing finite that will admit of a comparison with him who

[h] Jam. ii. 5.
[i] 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.
[k] 2 Cor. viii. 9.
[l] 2 Cor. v. 21.

who is infinite. As for his mercy, he most of all is grieved to have that disparaged, because it is the attribute in which he chiefly delights. Whatever then be your sins, or sorrows, or wants, or fears, cast them all on him, and know that you shall never be disappointed: for "as his majesty is, so also is his mercy."]

3. To glorify him—

[We have no fear, but that if once you are led to trust in him aright, your most anxious inquiry will be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?" Methinks you will of yourselves be panting after opportunities to testify to him your love and gratitude[l]. You will see, that to surrender up yourselves wholly to him is your "reasonable service[m]." Knowing that "you are not your own, but are bought with a price, you will long to glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his[n]." We call you then to this blessed duty, to "live no more unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again." He has made you most blessed among men; for "who is like unto thee, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord[o]?" O let it be seen then, that he has made you also the most holy of all the people upon earth. He has set you among the princes now, that you may have fellowship with all the holy Prophets and Apostles of old: and by walking in their steps, you will soon arrive at those blissful mansions, where you shall share with them in their inheritance, and be yourselves "kings and priests unto God and our Father for ever and ever."]

[l] Jer. x. 6, 7. [m] Rom. xii. 1. [n] 1 Cor. vi. 20.
[o] Deut. xxxiii. 2, 9.

## CCCCXIV.

### THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE.

Ps. cxvi. 1—7. *I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful! The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

THE

THE abruptness of this psalm shews, that it was the fruit of much previous meditation: the writer of it had been "musing in his heart, till at last the fire kindled, and he spake with his tongue." It begins, "I love:" and, though our Translators had not supplied the deficiency, there would have remained no doubt on the mind of the Reader, who it was that was the object of the Psalmist's regard. The fact is, that nothing so endears the Deity to the souls of men as answers to prayer; nor does any thing so encourage sinners to address him with unwearied importunity. The two first verses of the psalm are a kind of summary of the whole; setting forth in few words what he afterwards expatiates upon more at length: but though we shall, on this account, pass them over in our discussion, we shall not be unmindful of the resolution contained in them, but shall conclude our subject with commending it to your most serious attention.

The points which now call for our notice are,

I. The troubles he had endured—

[We know not for certain what these were; but we are sure, that the psalm was written after the ark had been brought up to Mount Zion, and the worship of God had been permanently settled at Jerusalem[a]: and therefore we apprehend, that it was written on occasion of David's deliverance from some overwhelming distress both of body and mind, resembling that specified in the sixth psalm[b]. The terms used in our text might indeed be interpreted of death only; because the word "hell" often means nothing more than the grave: but we rather think that terrors of conscience, on account of his sin committed in the matter of Uriah, had given a tenfold poignancy to the fear of death, and that his experience was similar to that described in the 25th Psalm, where he says, "The troubles of my heart are enlarged; O bring thou me out of my distresses! Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and *forgive all my sins*[c]!"

But whatever was the precise occasion of David's sorrows, it is manifest, that, sooner or later, we must all be brought into a situation wherein his language will be exactly suitable to us. "The sorrows of death" will shortly "encompass us," and "the pains of hell," if we have not previously obtained a sense of reconciliation with God, will "get hold upon us;" and, in the contemplation of an approaching eternity, "we shall find trouble

[a] ver. 18, 19. [b] Ps. vi. 2, 3. [c] Ps. xxv. 17, 18.

trouble and sorrow," such as in our present state of carelessness and security we have no conception of. O that we could but bring our hearers to realize that awful hour, when we shall look back upon our mis-spent hours with unavailing regret, and look forward to our great account with fear and trembling, wishing, if it were possible, that we might have a fresh term of probation allowed us, or that the hills and mountains might cover us from the face of our offended God! Let all, even though, like David, they be monarchs upon their thrones, know, that the time must shortly arrive, when the things of time and sense will appear in all their real insignificance, and nothing will be deemed of any importance but the eternal welfare of the soul.]

Whatever his troubles had been, we have no doubt respecting,

II. The means he had used for his relief from them—

David had had recourse to prayer; "Then called I on the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!"

This is the proper remedy for all our troubles—

[" Is any afflicted? let him pray;" says an inspired Apostle. And God himself says, " Call upon me in the time of trouble; and I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Indeed, where else can we go with any hope of relief? If it be the death of the body that we dread, Man can do nothing for us, any farther than it shall please God to employ him as an instrument for our good. If it be the death of the soul which we fear, who but God can help us? Who can interpose between a sinner and his Judge? If we betake ourselves to a throne of grace, and " pray unto our God with strong crying and tears," we shall find that He " is able to save us from death:" but created powers are physicians of no value———]

We must however, in our prayers, resemble David—

[Behold what humility and fervour were manifested in this petition; " O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!" Prayer does not consist in fluent or eloquent expressions, but in ardent desires of the soul: and it may as well be uttered in sighs and groans, as in the most energetic words that language can afford. " God knoweth the mind of the Spirit," by whose inspiration all acceptable supplications are suggested. Never was there a petition more pleasing to God than that of the publican, " God be merciful to me a sinner!" nor did any prove more effectual for immediate relief than that recorded in our text. Truly this is a comfortable consideration to the broken-hearted penitent: the greatness of his sorrows perhaps prevents the enlargement of his heart

heart in prayer: but God estimates his prayers, not by their fluency, but by their sincerity; and that which is offered in indistinct and unutterable groans, is as intelligible and as acceptable to him, as if every request were offered in the most measured terms. Prayer thus offered, shall never go forth in vain.]

This appears from,

III. The success of those means—

Most encouraging is the testimony which the Psalmist bears to the condescension and goodness of God—

[Not a word intervenes between his petition for mercy and his acknowledgment of mercy received: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful." Here the Psalmist marks the union of justice and mercy in the dispensations of God's grace towards him: and that union is invariable, whenever we plead before him that great sacrifice which was made for the sins of the whole world, and which has fully satisfied the justice of our God. Moreover, he represents this mercy as the common lot of all, who in simplicity and godly sincerity implore it at God's hands; "The Lord preserveth the simple," and will never suffer one of them to perish. But then he brings it back again to his own experience, and acknowledges with heartfelt gratitude that God had received his prayer, and made him a most distinguished monument of his mercy.]

Such is the testimony which every contrite and believing suppliant shall be able to bear—

[Yes; justice is on the Believer's side, as well as mercy. Whoever comes to God in the name of Christ, may plead, that all his debts have been discharged by his great Surety, and that all the glory of heaven has been purchased for him by his Redeemer's blood. Through this infinitely meritorious atonement God is reconciled to man, and "the righteousness of Jehovah, no less than his mercy, is declared in the remission of sins[d]:" so that, "if we humbly confess our sins, God will be faithful and just in forgiving our sins, and in cleansing us from all unrighteousness[e]." Let "the simple"-hearted penitent rejoice in this assurance; and let every one labour from his own experience to say, "I was brought low, and he helped *me*."]

In the close of our text we see,

IV. The improvement which he made of his whole experience—

He determined henceforth to make God "the rest" of his soul—

[Truly

[d] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [e] 1 John i. 9.

[Truly there is no rest for the soul in any other. We may renew our attempts to seek it in this lower world, but we shall find none, except in the ark of God. Indeed the great use of troubles is to bring us to a conviction of this truth: and, whatever we may have suffered from "the sorrows of death," or "the pains of hell," we may bless and adore our God for the dispensation, if it dispose us at last to seek all our happiness in him — — —]

To the same "Rest" must we also continually "return"—

[As the needle of a compass which has sustained some violent concussion will continue its tremulous motion till it returns to the pole again, so must our souls do, if at any time they be through the violence of temptation diverted for a season from their God. Not a moment's rest should we even wish to have, till we find it in him alone. In all his perfections we have so many "chambers into which we may enter," and in which we may enjoy security from every impending danger. His omniscience will prevent surprise; his omnipotence will defeat our most potent adversaries: his love will comfort us under our most painful circumstances: and his faithfulness will preserve us even to the end. Let our troubles then drive us to him, and our experience of past mercies determine us to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

ADDRESS—

[We now revert to the resolution announced by the Psalmist at the very beginning of the psalm: "Because the Lord has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." This shews how justly he appreciated the Divine goodness; that he regarded it as an inexhaustible fountain, from whence the whole creation may incessantly "draw water with joy." The very command which God himself has given us, attests the same, and proves, that it is no less our privilege than our duty to "pray without ceasing," to "pray, and not faint." Oh Brethren, let every answer to prayer bring you back again more speedily to the throne of grace; and every communication of blessings to your souls make you more importunate for further blessings, till "your cup runneth over," and you are "filled with all the fulness of God."]

## CCCCXV.

### GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

Ps. cxvi. 8, 9. *Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

IT is justly said by David, in another psalm, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein[a]:" and great indeed they will appear, to all who endeavour to trace them even in the narrow sphere of their own experience. David, it is true, had a greater variety of extraordinary incidents to enumerate, and of mercies to be thankful for, than almost any other person whatever; but still there is no such difference between his experience and that of other men, but that his complaints may be poured out by them, and his thanksgivings be adopted by them. In the psalm before us he seems to have been delivered from some heavy afflictions, and to have been raised from the depths of sorrow to an extraordinary elevation of peace and joy. He had been encompassed with the sorrows of death, and the pains of hell had got hold upon him; but God, in answer to his prayers, had graciously delivered him from all his troubles.

In the words which we have just read, we see,

I. His review of past mercies—

God, it seems, had delivered,

1. His "soul from death"—

[In its primary sense, we apprehend, these words refer to the death of the body. Saul had sought to the utmost of his power to destroy him: but God had on many occasions signally interposed for his protection, and had preserved him to the present hour. And have not we also reason to adore our God for the interpositions of his providence in our behalf? Though we have not been in similar circumstances with David, we have been exposed to many dangers, both seen, and unseen; and have therefore just occasion to adopt before God the same expressions of reverential gratitude.

But

[a] Ps. cxi. 2.

But we must doubtless include under these terms a deliverance from eternal death also[b]. David was assured that God had "forgiven all his sins[c]," not excepting those committed in the matter of Uriah[d]: well therefore might he magnify the grace which had been exercised towards him. And have not we also reason to magnify our God for having rescued our souls from perdition? *True; many of us, it is to be feared, are yet in an unpardoned state: nevertheless, even they have cause to bless God that they have not long since been consigned over to everlasting and irremediable misery. Millions of the human race have been cut off in their sins, though they had not, it may be, attained one half the measure of iniquity that lies upon our souls: and yet they have been taken, and we left. O let us admire and adore this inscrutable mystery, and let us give unto God the glory due unto his name!

But it may be that our souls are in a pardoned state; and that God has "taken a live coal from off the altar, and applied it to our lips, saying, Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged[e]." If so, what acknowledgments should we make? Verily there can be no circumstances whatever in which such persons should not bless God from their very inmost souls[f].]

2. His eyes from tears—

[David often found occasion to weep, either on his own account or on account of others[g]. Indeed his whole life was tempestuous and full of trouble. What the particular affliction was from which he had now been delivered, we do not exactly know. If it was sickness and death, his tears must have proceeded, as Hezekiah's did, from an apprehension of the distraction and misery that were likely to ensue to the whole State by his removal from it at that time[h]. But whatever it was, his mind was now at ease in relation to it.

And are *we* at this time free from any great affliction? Surely we have reason to be thankful for it: for, how numberless are the sources of grief from whence our whole souls may speedily be overwhelmed! In our own persons we are exposed to diseases and accidents every moment. In our relative connexions too, how many occasions of sorrow are ever ready to arise! the misconduct of one, the unkindness of another, the misfortunes of a third, the death of one that was to us as our own souls,—alas! alas! it is a vale of tears that we are passing through, moaning or bemoaned every hour. Our very pleasures not unfrequently become

[b] Compare Ps. lxxxvi. 13. & Isai. xxxviii. 17.
[c] Ps. ciii. 3. [d] 2 Sam. xii. 13. [e] Isai. vi. 6, 7.
[f] 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. N.B. This is the very commencement of an Epistle written to "Strangers who were scattered all the world over by cruel persecutions."
[g] Ps. xlii. 3. 2 Sam. xiii. 36. & xv. 30. & xviii. 33
[h] Isai. xxxviii. 9—14.

become occasions of the bitterest pains. If then we have been kept for any time in a good measure of peaceful serenity, we may well account it a rich blessing, for which we are bound to adore and magnify our God. It is not from the dust that either our trials or our comforts spring: and, if God have dealt to us an abundance of earthly comfort, whilst so many thousands of our fellow-creatures are racked with pain, or bowed down with sorrows, we ought to acknowledge him as the author and giver of these distinguished privileges.]

3. His feet from falling—

[On more than one occasion, David's "feet had well nigh slipped." When urged to kill Saul, and when hastening to avenge himself on Nabal, he was on the brink of a dangerous precipice, from whence however it pleased God to deliver him. And what a miracle of mercy is it, if *our* feet are kept! Consider with what innumerable snares and temptations we are beset on every side, and what corruptions reign in our own hearts, ready to precipitate us into any evil: consider the deceitfulness of sin too, what pleasing and even innocent forms it will assume: consider also the malice and subtlety of our great adversary, who is going about continually as a roaring lion seeking to devour us: consider more particularly how many persons of eminence in the religious world have fallen; a David, a Solomon, a Peter; O have not we reason to adore our God, if our feet have been kept from falling; more especially when we reflect, how near we have been to many grievous falls, when nothing but God's infinite mercy has held us up!

Let us look back then on these mercies vouchsafed unto us, and, from the review, let us follow David in,]

II. His determination arising from it—

By "the land of the living" we understand this present world[i], where alone there is any opportunity of making suitable returns to God. "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day," says Hezekiah[k]. As long as he should live, David determined, with God's help, to walk before God,

1. In a constant attendance on his ordinances—

[This is particularly intended in the words of our text: *twice* is the idea expressly stated in the following verses[l]. And where should a person go to make his acknowledgments to God, but to his house, where the free-will offerings and thank-offerings of old were wont to be brought? A grateful heart will pant after

[i] Ps. xxvii. 13. Isai. liii. 8.
[k] ib. ver. 19.
[l] ver. 12, 14, 17, 18, 19.

after these public opportunities of glorifying God, even as the hart panteth after the water-brooks[m]; and to be deprived of access to them will be a source of pain and grief[n]. David envied the very swallows their liberty of access to the House of God, when he was kept at a distance from it[o]. Let us shew our gratitude in the same way. And let not our attendance on his courts, after a recovery from sickness, be a mere prelude to our return to all the gaieties and follies of the world; but let our delight be in the worship of our God on earth, as an earnest and foretaste of our enjoyment of him in a better world.]

2. Under an abiding sense of his presence—

[To "set the Lord always before us" is the sure way to honour him. Whether we think of him or not, "he is always about our bed and about our paths, and spieth out all our ways." Wherever we are, therefore, there should be that inscription, which Hagar saw, "Thou God seest me." O how circumspect would then our conduct be! How continually would that question occur to our minds, "What will my God approve?" That this is the frame of mind which every Child of God will cultivate, is beautifully represented by St. Paul in his address to Servants: he tells them how the servant of God *does* act towards his heavenly Master, and proposes it as a pattern for them towards their earthly masters[p] — — — Let us "not be mere eye-servants, as men-pleasers," but exert ourselves at all times to please our God, as servants do under the immediate eye of their master.]

3. In a cheerful obedience to his commands—

[*This* is to walk before God in deed and in truth[q]: and to produce this, is the very end of all God's mercies towards us. Surely, if we are in any measure sensible of our obligations to God, we shall not account any of "his commandments grievous." We shall not wish so much as one of them to be relaxed, but shall attend to all of them without partiality and without hypocrisy. Happy would it be for us if more of this gratitude were found amongst us. Happy would it be if the love which God has shewn to us in Christ Jesus constrained us to live altogether unto God; so that we could make the same appeal to him that Hezekiah did, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have *walked before thee in truth*, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight[r]." This is the surest test of our integrity, and the most acceptable expression of our gratitude to God.]

In our REFLECTIONS on this subject, we cannot but view in it abundant matter,

1. For

[m] Ps. xlii. 1, 2. [n] ib. ver. 3, 4. [o] Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4.
[p] Eph. vi. 5—8. [q] 1 Kin. ii. 3, 4. [r] Isai. xxxviii. 3.

1. For our humiliation—

[How many mercies have we received, yet never stood amazed at the goodness of our God! Were it only *this*, that our souls are not consigned over to everlasting death, we should have cause to bless our God day and night. Only reflect a moment, how dreadful it would have been to be cut off in our sins, and to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! And yet who amongst us has not richly deserved it? who has not been in constant danger of it from day to day? Our sins have been more in number than the hairs of our head; yet not a thousandth part so great as they would have been, if we had been left to carry into act all the evil dispositions of our hearts. Truly if we have not run into the same enormities with others, it is God, and God alone, who has made the difference between us. What shall we say then to the insensibility which we have manifested under all these stupendous mercies? Are we not ashamed? Have we not reason to be ashamed, yea, and to abase ourselves before God in dust and ashes? O let us remember that ingratitude is a sin of the most crimson dye[s]: and that, if we will not notice as we ought the operations of God's hands, his loving-kindness will ere long be shut up in everlasting displeasure[t].]

2. For our encouragement—

[To the evil and to the unthankful have all these mercies been vouchsafed: What then shall not be done for us, if we will seek after God in sincerity and truth? Surely these present blessings shall be only as the drop before the shower; they shall be a prelude to that blessedness, "where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor sin, but where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes for ever[u]." God offers himself to every one of us, as a Covenant God: he says to each of us, as he did to Abraham of old, "I am God Almighty: walk before me, and be thou perfect[x]." In Christ Jesus he is already reconciled to us; and he only requires that we come to him through Christ, embracing his proffered mercies, and yielding up ourselves to him as those that are alive from the dead. O that he may so draw us, that we may run after him; and so subdue us to the obedience of faith, that we may become a peculiar people, zealous of good works!]

[s] Rom. i. 21.
[t] Ps. xxviii. 5.
[u] Rev. xxi. 4.
[x] Gen. xvii. 1.

## CCCCXVI.

### HOW TO REQUITE THE LORD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. cxvi. 12—14. *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord... I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.*

THE influence of faith on our eternal salvation is obvious to all who have any just views of the Gospel: but its operation on the mind in this present life, and its efficacy to produce peace and holiness, are by no means generally understood. In this view however the psalm before us is peculiarly instructive. David, when his faith failed him, overlooked all the mercies that he had received at the Lord's hands, and rashly concluded, that all which had been declared to him respecting the purpose of God to establish him on the throne of Israel, was false: "I said in my haste, all men are liars." But, when his faith was strengthened, he no longer gave way to such querulous expressions and desponding fears: on the contrary, he then was full of peace, and joy; and with the liveliest emotions of love and gratitude, exclaimed, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" That we may be brought to this happy state of mind, and may be led to abound in praise and thanksgiving, let us contemplate,

I. The benefits which our God has conferred upon us—

On such an inexhaustible subject as this, we can do no more than suggest a few leading thoughts, which may be more largely prosecuted in our secret retirement. To contemplate them in all their fulness will be the blissful employment of eternity. Let us notice those,

1. Of creation—

[How distinguished is our condition above all other creatures upon the face of the earth! In bodily powers, it is true, we are exceeded by many; who have not only far greater strength and agility than we, but their senses also of sight, and hearing, and

and taste, and smelling, and of feeling also, far more exquisite than ours. But the endowment of reason elevates us far above them all, and puts them all, in some degree at least, in subjection under our feet. In them indeed is instinct, and that too in such perfection as almost to border on the province of reason; but in us is a capacity to comprehend things of spiritual and eternal import, and an ability to know, to love, to enjoy, to glorify our God. Say whether these be not mercies which call for the devoutest gratitude at our hands?

Nor is it a small matter that we have been brought into the world at such a *time*, when the light of God's truth is so clearly seen, and in such a *place* as Britain, where it shines forth, as it were, in meridian splendor. We might have been born of Mahometan or Heathen parents; or even in our own country have been so situated, as to hear but little of Christ and his salvation. Surely we should not overlook these great benefits, nor forget what a mercy it is to live in this present day, when there exists such an ardent zeal for the propagation of the Gospel, and such unprecedent efforts are made for its diffusion throughout the world.]

2. Of Providence—

[Innumerable are the deliverances which we have all received from dangers seen and unseen. Millions have been taken out of the world before they had attained our age; and it is to God's gracious care alone we owe it, that we have yet "space given us for repentance," and time afforded us for securing the things belonging to our peace. And how different might be our condition from what it is! We might be so destitute of every comfort, and so oppressed with pain and anguish, that our very existence, instead of being a blessing, might be a burthen and a curse. We all, it is true, have trials of some kind or other; but we all have our consolations also; and those who have most afflictions, have in themselves an evidence, how greatly we are all indebted to our God for that measure of consolation which is given to mitigate our sorrows, and how infinitely short of our deserts is any trouble which is allotted us in this world.]

3. Of Redemption—

[But how shall we speak of this? Who can "comprehend the height and depth of God's love" displayed in it? That God should so pity us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us! that he should lay our iniquities on him, as our Surety, and thus make a way for the display of all his own glorious perfections in the salvation of man! What shall we say to this? It is "a love that passeth knowledge." Every part of it is described as far exceeding all finite comprehension. The "riches" of grace contained in it, are "unsearchable:" the "peace" flowing from it, "passeth understanding:" the "joy" imparted by it, is "unspeakable and full of glory." The whole mystery of Redemption, as

 contrived,

contrived, as executed, as applied, and as experienced in the souls of men, is so great, that we cannot contemplate it a moment, without exclaiming, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out[a]!"]

Having thus briefly touched upon the mercies of our God, let us proceed to mark,

II. The sense we should have of them—

It is not any slight acknowledgment that becomes us: we should contemplate them,

1. With overwhelming gratitude—

[This is implied in the Psalmist's expression, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" It is not a calm inquiry, but the language of a heart oppressed, as it were, with a load of obligation. A man who can speak calmly on such a subject, nay, I had almost said, a man who can speak at all upon it, feels it not as he ought; it is too big for utterance: as, in a mind overwhelmed with conscious unworthiness, "the Spirit of God maketh intercession with groans which cannot be uttered," so methinks, if we had a just apprehension of the benefits conferred upon us, our sense of them would be expressed rather in a way of silent adoration, than of verbal acknowledgment. We do not mean by this, that men should not sing praises to their God, and tell of all his wondrous works; for it is our bounden duty to celebrate them to the utmost of our power[b]: ——— but, in our present state of darkness and ignorance, it is rarely given to men so fully to behold all the wonders of God's love, as to have their organs of vision blinded by the overwhelming splendor of the light: we "see at present only in part:" we "behold things only, as in a mirrour, darkly:" as "Moses put a veil upon his face" to hide from the admiring Israelites that glory which they were "unable stedfastly to behold," so God has, in mercy, veiled even his goodness from us, because we are incapable of supporting the ineffable effulgence of his glory. Of what we do see, we must say, with Job, "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power" (we may add too, the riches of his goodness) "who can understand[c]?"]

2. With practical self-devotion—

[However overwhelmed our minds may be, there must be in us a determination of heart to render to the Lord all the service of which he has made us capable. Our gratitude to him must be, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." His love must have a constraining influence on our souls: it must "constrain

[a] Rom. xi. 33. [b] Isai. xii. 14—6. [c] Job xxvi. 46.

"constrain us no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again[d]." Every blessing we enjoy must lead us to him who of his great mercy and bounty has bestowed it on us: and the consideration of redeeming love especially must animate us to a total surrender of ourselves, in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of our God[e]. As, under the Law, the slaughtered victims were wholly burnt by fire upon the altar, so, under the Gospel, must we offer ourselves up wholly to the Lord "as living sacrifices." This is nothing more than our reasonable service[f]: "We are not our own; we are bought with a price: and therefore we should glorify God with our body and in our spirit, which are his[g]."]

But let us somewhat more distinctly consider,

III. The way in which we should requite them—

The example of the pious Jews is very instructive—

[The Jews were encouraged under their troubles to betake themselves to God, and to make vows unto the Most High: and these vows they were required strictly to perform. On paying their vows to their heavenly Benefactor, they presented certain sacrifices, of which they and their families were permitted to partake, in remembrance of God's mercies towards them, and as an expression of their gratitude to him[h]. On these occasions, it was common for the master of the family to close the feast by taking a cup of wine, and drinking of it, first himself, and afterwards all his family in succession; and then to close the whole with a hymn. To this custom it should seem that David refers in other psalms[i], as well as in the passage before us: and our blessed Lord adopted it as a suitable method of commemorating the wonders of his dying love[k]. He took a cup, and blessed it, and gave it to his Disciples, that they, and all his followers, to the very end of time, might drink it in remembrance of his blood shed for the remission of their sins[l].]

After this example we should pay our vows, and "receive the cup of salvation," or, as that used by the Jews was called, "the cup of deliverances"—

[Is it asked, What sacrifice are we to offer? I answer, The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving[m]. "The calves of our lips" are far more acceptable to God than all the burnt-offerings that ever were offered[n]. And surely the Sacramental cup, of which every Believer should frequently partake, may at once remind us of

[d] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [e] 1 Thess. v. 23. [f] Rom. xii. 1.
[g] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [h] Lev. vii. 12. Deut. xii. 6, 7, 17, 18.
[i] Ps. ixvi. 13—16. & cvii. 22. [k] Matt. xxvi. 27.
[l] 1 Cor. xi. 25. [m] Heb. xiii. 15.
[n] Ps. l. 13, 14. with Hos. xiv. 2.

of all the mercies we have ever received, and be taken by us as a memorial of God's unbounded love to us, and of our unfeigned surrender of ourselves to him. In these expressions of our love and gratitude we should have all the powers of our souls called forth: "all that is within us should bless the name of our God:" and the entire devotion of ourselves to his service should bear witness to our sincerity before him. Never are we to be restrained by fear or shame: no; we must pay our vows "in the presence of all his people." If we are ashamed of Christ, what can we expect, but that he will be ashamed of us? But, "if we confess him before men, then will he also confess us in the presence of his Father and his holy angels." Here then is the service which we are to render unto God in return for all his benefits: we are to confess him, to magnify him, to adore him, to give up ourselves to him as his redeemed people, to live altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving all out of his fulness, and improving all for the honour of his name. So entirely should we be the Lord's, that "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to his glory[o]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet instituted this inquiry—

[Alas! how many have never made any other use of God's mercies, but to render them means of self-destruction, and instruments of dishonouring their God! Has he given them abundance? they have employed it in riot and excess. Has he vouchsafed to them health and strength? they have turned these blessings into an occasion of more unbridled licentiousness. Has he bestowed intellectual powers upon them? they have perverted these to justify their evil ways, and to dispute the authority of God. The very Gospel itself they have abused as sanctioning their presumptuous hopes, and as affording reason for dissipating all fear of God's displeasure. Ah, Brethren! what will be the end of these things? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise?" How will ye answer it at the last day? When your Judge shall put the question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard than I did? what excuse will ye offer for bringing forth only wild grapes[p]?" Do but think of these things, ere it be too late. But if ye will not lay these things to heart, then know assuredly, that, if ye will not render unto the Lord according to his works of mercy, he will render unto you according to your aggravated iniquities.]

2. Those who profess to feel their obligations to their God—

[Examine,

[o] 1 Cor. x. 31. [p] Isai. v. 1—4.

[Examine, I beseech you, the returns which *you* have made: do they not "fill you with shame and confusion of face?" Are ye not perfectly astonished at your own ingratitude? Oh! see what need there is to walk humbly before God. But yet, do not despond. Your "God is able to make all grace abound towards you:" and, if you call upon him, "he will give you more grace," even grace sufficient for you, so that you shall be able to "render to him, in some measure at least, according to the benefits he has conferred upon you. You see how he wrought in David, and in his holy Apostles: and is his arm shortened, that it cannot reach to you? Arise, and bless your God; walk joyfully before him; "let your hearts be lifted up in his ways:" come, and take the cup of salvation; and, as one great family, hand it round, each, as it were, to the other, that all of you may be encouraged, and all be comforted, and all be strengthened. "*Now*," even *now*, take the blessed cup into your hands; and drink of it "in the presence of all his people;" yea, drink, and live for ever. And inquire with yourselves, inquire of each other, yea, inquire of God himself, what you can do for him; and let your capacity for his service be the only measure of your exertion.]

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## CCCCXVII.

### THE GENTILES CALLED TO PRAISE GOD.

Ps. cxvii. *O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people: for his merciful kindness is great towards us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.*

THIS is the shortest of all the Psalms: but it is by no means the least interesting: the energy with which it is expressed abundantly marks the importance of the truths contained in it, and the feelings with which it should be read by us. The same sentiments are doubtless contained in many other psalms: but, to a mind that is rightly disposed, they are ever new: they need no embellishment to adorn them, no eloquence to set them forth: if any man can hear or reflect upon them without emotion, the fault is in himself alone. Let us consider the psalm,

I. In a general view—

Here is a call to the whole world to praise and adore their God. Those perfections which they are more especially called to celebrate, are,

1. The

1. The greatness of his mercy—

[Reflect on his *sparing* mercy. Consider the state of the whole world, which has so cast off their allegiance to God, that "he is not in all their thoughts"———Consider the inconceivable mass of iniquity that has been accumulating now nearly six thousand years———and yet we are spared! Once indeed God destroyed the world; but only once. On some few occasions God has marked his indignation against sin; but on very few: an Achan, an Uzzah, an Ananias have been set up as witnesses for God, that he hateth iniquity: but these only serve the more strikingly to illustrate the astonishing forbearance of our God———Let every one of us look back upon his own personal transgressions, and then say, whether he himself is not an astonishing monument of God's forbearance.

But if we so admire the sparing mercy of our God, what shall we say of his *redeeming* mercy? What words can we ever find sufficient to express the wonders of God's love, in substituting his own Son, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, in our place, and laying the iniquities of a ruined world on HIM? Here we are altogether lost in wonder. The idea of Redemption is so vast, that we cannot grasp it. We assent to it; we believe it; we trust in it: but it so far exceeds all our comprehension, that it appears rather like "a cunningly devised fable," than a reality. We see a little of the *suitableness and sufficiency* of this salvation; but it is only "as in a glass darkly;" it is only ænigmatically[a] that we view it at all; spelling it out, as it were, from a few scattered hints, and guessing at what we cannot comprehend. The *freeness* with which it is offered also, no less surpasses knowledge. By the way in which God himself follows us with offers, and intreaties, it should seem almost as if *his* happiness, rather than *ours*, depended on our acceptance of it. The *continuance* of these offers, made as they are from year to year to people who only pour contempt upon them, and trample on that adorable Saviour who shed his blood for them,—O! what an emphasis does *this* give to that expression in our text, "His merciful kindness is *great* towards us!"

Should not the whole universe adore our God for THIS?]

2. The inviolability of his truth—

[Were his truth considered in reference to his threatenings, it would be an awful subject indeed: but we are called to notice it at present only in connexion with his promises. All the mercy which God was pleased to vouchsafe to man, he has made over to us by an everlasting covenant, which was confirmed with an oath, and ratified with the blood of his only dear Son. There is not any thing which fallen man can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity, which has not been made the subject

[a] See 1 Cor. xiii. 12. the Greek.

subject of a distinct promise. And who ever heard of one single promise failing him who trusted in it? Who ever heard of one sinner rejected, who came to God in the way prescribed? To the Jewish nation many specific promises were made: Did any one of them fail? Did not Joshua, after the final settlement of the Jews in Canaan, bear testimony for God in this respect, in the presence of the whole assembled nation, and appeal to them for the truth of his assertions[b]? And are not all of you, who have ever rested in, and pleaded, God's gracious promises, been constrained to bear a similar testimony in his behalf?

Let the whole world then adore and magnify the Lord on this ground; and never be weary of acknowledging, that "his mercy endureth for ever[c]."]

Let us now proceed to consider the psalm,

II. With a more immediate reference to the Gentile world—

The psalm is in reality a prophecy; and so important a prophecy, that St. Paul expressly quotes one part of it[d], and gives, as it were, an explanation of the remainder[e].

It declares the calling of the Gentiles—

[In this sense it has been interpreted, even by some of the Jews themselves: and we are sure that this is its true import, because an inspired Apostle has put this construction upon it. And are not we ourselves evidences of its truth? Are not *we* Gentiles? and has not God's mercy reached unto *us*? Are not his promises also fulfilled to *us*? The promise to Abraham was, that "in him, and in his seed, should *all the nations of the earth* be blessed:" and this promise was made to him whilst he was yet uncircumcised, in order that the interest which we uncircumcised Gentiles had in it might be more fully manifest[f]. Behold then, *we* are living witnesses both of God's mercy and truth! His promises are fulfilled to us, yea, and are yet daily fulfilling before our eyes. The blessings of salvation are poured down upon us in rich abundance. The Church is daily enlarging on every side of us. Both at home and abroad is the Gospel running and glorified, to an extent that has never been seen since the Apostolic age. And the time for its universal diffusion through the whole earth is manifestly drawing nigh. We have seen enough with our eyes to assure us, that the fuller accomplishment of God's promises

[b] Josh. xxiii. 14.

[c] See Ps. cxxxvi. where it is repeated twenty-six times in as many verses.

[d] Rom. xv. 11.

[e] ib. ver. 8, 9. where God's *truth* and *mercy* are both specified, as illustrated and confirmed by Christ.

[f] Rom. iv. 11.

promises may be expected in due season: and that, at the appointed hour, "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ."]

In this view, all the Gentile world are called upon to bless and praise their God—

[Ye, who are here assembled, arise and praise your God. Consider what mercy has been shewn to *you*: consider what *truth* has been displayed towards *you*. Arise, I say; yea, again and again would I repeat it, Arise and praise your God! And, ye remotest nations of the earth, O that our voice could reach to you! O that ye knew your obligations to your God, and the blessings that are in reserve for you! The Saviour was called, "The Desire of all nations;" and such indeed he ought to be. Well! if ye know him not, and consequently rejoice not in him, we will rejoice for you: for he is coming to you: the Messengers of the Lord of Hosts are going forth into every quarter of the globe; and the Word that reveals him to you is translating, in purpose and intention at least, into all the languages of the earth; and we anticipate with joy the time, when all the Heathen shall serve him, and "all flesh shall see the Salvation of God."]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there any amongst you who have no disposition to praise the Lord?

[Alas! there are too many, who have no delight in this blessed work, and have never spent one hour in it in all their lives! Ah! wretched and ingrate! What think ye of yourselves? Are ye not blind, when ye cannot see the perfections of your God? Are ye not base, when ye can receive such mercies at God's hands, and never acknowledge them? Are ye not brutish, yea, worse than brutish? for "the ox and ass know their owner; but ye know not," nor acknowledge, your Creator, your Benefactor, your Redeemer? See how far you are from a truly Christian state! Tell me not of your moral qualities; ye are base ungrateful creatures: and, if a fellow-creature were to treat you as you treat your God, you would abhor him utterly. O repent, and embrace the mercy that is yet offered you! or else you will find that He, who is true to his promises, will be true to his threatenings also.]

2. Are there amongst you some who desire to praise the Lord?

[We believe it; we rejoice in it: we pray to God to increase their number an hundred-fold. But do ye not find that your thanks and praises are infinitely short of what the occasion for them demands? Yes, Methinks there is nothing so humiliating to a Christian as the services which he attempts to render to his God.

God. However, still go on to serve him as ye *can*, when ye cannot serve him as ye *would*. And, to quicken your zeal, contemplate much and deeply the greatness of God's mercy to you, and the inviolability of his truth. God has designed that such contemplations should be a rich source of comfort to yourselves, as they will be also of love and gratitude to him. And, whilst your own souls are filled with these divine affections, endeavour to diffuse the sacred flame, that all around you, and, if possible, all the nations of the world, may be stirred up to render unto God the praises due unto his name.]

## CCCCXVIII.

### THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST A GROUND OF CONFIDENCE.

Ps. cxviii. 27, 28. *God is the Lord which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee.*

HOWEVER plainly this psalm refers to David, we are sure that a greater than David is here. The words as applied to David, convey an exceedingly grand and important meaning. He had met with many obstacles in his advancement to the throne of Israel. Oftentimes had his life been sought by Saul: and since the death of Saul there were many formidable conspiracies against him. No sooner was he made king over Israel, than the Philistines sought, and *that* repeatedly, to destroy him[a]; and it was only through the special intervention of God himself that he was able to prevail against them. It appears that many other of the surrounding nations also conspired against him[b]; but through the same almighty power he was enabled to subdue them. At last, after more than seven years' opposition from all the tribes of Israel[c], he was firmly fixed upon the throne, and "the stone which had been so long rejected of the builders was made the head of the

[a] 2 Sam. v. 17, 18, 22.

[b] ver. 10—12. *Four times* does he repeat, and, in the last, with a very expressive simile, "They compassed me about."

[c] 2 Sam. v. 4, 5.

the corner[d]." This event reflected great "light" upon all God's purposes respecting him. Darkness had hung over him for a long period; but it was now dispelled; and he saw clearly these two important truths, *That God's counsel, by whomsoever opposed, shall stand;* and, *that they who trust in the Lord, however tried they may be, shall never be confounded.*

But, as we said, A greater than David is here. It was generally acknowledged amongst the Jews themselves that David was a type of the Messiah, and that this psalm had an especial reference to him who was in due time to sit upon the throne of David. Hence the acclamations which were used by the people on the occasion of David's installation, were used by the Jews in reference to Christ[e]: and he vindicated their conduct in this particular[f]: and afterwards appealed to this very psalm in confirmation of his predictions respecting his rejection by them, and his subsequent elevation to the throne of David[g]. In like manner, after the death and resurrection of Christ, St. Peter, "when he was filled with the Holy Ghost," expressly applied to Christ this very passage, and affirmed in the presence of all the Rulers and Elders of Israel that it was accomplished in the exaltation of that Jesus whom they had crucified[h].

Now in this event, the exaltation of Christ to the throne of glory, God has indeed "shewed us light:" and it will be a profitable subject for our meditation at this time, if we consider,

I. The light which God has shewn us—

Previous to the resurrection of Christ, all was darkness: the Disciples themselves doubted whether they had not been deceived in their expectations respecting him. But from that event, and his consequent ascension to the right hand of God, we learn infallibly,

1. The efficacy of his atonement—

[Had he not risen, we might have conceived of him as a great

[d] ver. 22. [e] Matt. xxi. 9. [f] ib. ver. 16.
[g] ib. ver. 42. [h] Acts iv. 8, 11.

great Prophet indeed, but as nothing more than a prophet, who, like multitudes who had preceded him, sealed his doctrines with his own blood. But he had spoken of his death as a ransom to be paid for the souls of men: and how could we have known that that ransom was accepted, if his resurrection, which he himself taught his Disciples to look forward to as the proof and evidence of his acceptance, had not been effected. But when we see that he did rise from the dead, and did ascend to heaven in the presence of his Disciples, and did send down the Holy Spirit according to his word to bear testimony concerning him, there is no room left for doubt: we are perfectly sure that his offering was accepted of the Father, and that by his obedience unto death he has wrought out eternal redemption for us[i].]

2. The sufficiency of his grace—

[Even when our blessed Lord was on earth, the whole creation, animate and inanimate, terrestrial and infernal, were obedient to his will: how much more therefore, now that he is exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and has all fulness treasured up in him for the benefit of his people, must he be able to "do all things which we call upon him for!" If he says, as he did to St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee," we may safely adopt Paul's language, and say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." If all enemies are put under his feet, they shall assuredly be put under ours also: even "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly."]

3. The excellency of his salvation—

[Behold what has taken place with respect to him! He is exalted to the throne of God, and possessed of all the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were made. The same glory is reserved for us also[k], and a participation of that very throne which his Father has given to him[l]. Believer, contemplate all the glory and felicity of your exalted Head; and then see what is prepared for all his members: "your body shall be like unto his glorious body;" your soul shall be transformed into his perfect image; and all the glory which his Father has given him, shall be your inalienable and everlasting inheritance[m].]

What a glorious light is this! Let it lead us to contemplate,

II. The returns which it calls for at our hands—

Surely such discoveries as are here made to us should call forth our devoutest affections: they should lead us,

1. To

[i] Rom. i. 4. & viii. 34.
[k] Luke xxii. 29.
[l] Rev. iii. 21.
[m] John xvii. 22. 1 Pet. i. 4.

1. To surrender up ourselves entirely to God—

[The sacrifices which David and Solomon offered unto God were almost without number[n]: but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, or of a devout and grateful heart, outweighs them all[o]. Whether the sacrifices were ever "bound to the horns of the altar," we are not informed: but sure enough our hearts need to be bound; for they are ever ready to "start aside as a broken bow," and "to backslide from God as a backsliding heifer:" and we should labour incessantly to say with David, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." The example of Abraham may assist us in this particular. The offering of his son was a dark dispensation: but, when God arrested the arm of Abraham, and forbad him to inflict the fatal wound, a light beamed in upon his soul; he saw a risen Saviour presented to him under the image of his restored son: and instantly "he took the ram which was caught in the thicket, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son[p]. Let the sight of a risen Saviour operate in like manner upon us; let us take the offering which all of us have at hand, and which we know will be pleasing to the Lord, even "the offering of a free heart," and let us present it a living sacrifice to God, as our reasonable and most delightful service[q].]

2. To rejoice and glory in God as our portion for ever—

[Like Paul, we may say of Christ, "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*." Indeed, without this appropriation of God and his blessings to our own souls, we can never attain to a joyful and thankful spirit: but it is the privilege of every Believer to say of Christ, "He is my friend, He is my beloved." God approves of this language, by whomsoever used, provided only it be used in sincerity and truth; "Thou art *my* God, and I will praise thee; thou art *my* God, I will exalt thee." If under the Old Testament, Believers could say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," much more may we regard him as "the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are yet in darkness—

[Long was the night with which David was enclosed, insomuch that he sometimes feared he should "one day perish by the hands of Saul:" yet at last the day dawned upon him, and "God shewed him light." Dark also were the dispensations towards

[n] 1 Chron. xxix. 21. 1 Kin. viii. 62, 63.
[o] Ps. l. 13, 14. & li. 16, 17. [p] Gen. xxii. 13.
[q] Rom. xii. 1. with Heb. xiii. 15.

towards our blessed Lord, till in his resurrection and ascension the true light was made to shine. Let not any of us then indulge desponding fears: let us know assuredly, that "the counsel of God shall stand," and that "they who trust in him shall never be confounded." Indeed even "in our darkness the Lord will be a light unto us;" and soon "our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day."]

2. To those who have been "brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light"—

[Happy, happy ye, who behold a risen Saviour, and see the fulness which ye have in him! Ye may be sweetly assured, that, as he is able, so also he engaged, to "save your souls to the uttermost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for you." But let this light have its proper influence upon your minds. "Walk as children of the light" and of the day: yea, "walk in the light, as he is in the light." If you do indeed "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," "*it is God the Lord who hath shewn it to you*;" and "ye, as his peculiar people, are called to shew forth his praises[r]." Do this then in the way before prescribed: give up yourselves wholly unto him; and take him as your only, your everlasting, portion.]

[r] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

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## CCCCXIX.

### HOW TO ATTAIN DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

Ps. cxix. 18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!*

THE necessity of Divine teaching, in order to a spiritual acquaintance with the truth of God, is by many denied; and all expectation of the Holy Spirit's influence for that end is derided as enthusiasm. But, however the profane ungodly world may scoff at the idea, it is "by the Spirit of God alone that we can know the things which are freely given to us of God[a]:" and the wisest of men, as much as the most ignorant, has reason to adopt the petition in our text, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!"

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 12.

I. What wondrous things are contained in God's law—

If we understand the law here spoken of, as importing the Law of Moses, it certainly is full of wonders: the moral law, being a perfect transcript of the mind of God; and the ceremonial law, being a shadow of all those good things which are revealed to us in the Gospel. But we apprehend that David is speaking rather of the Gospel, even of that "law which is come forth from Zion, and that word which has proceeded from Jerusalem." No one of the Prophets, scarcely excepting even Isaiah himself, had clearer or richer views of Christ, than David; and as he speaks of Christ in almost all his psalms, we may justly suppose, that in this place he refers to the wonders that are contained in the Gospel of Christ.

Consider the Gospel generally—

[In it is revealed salvation, salvation purchased by the blood and righteousness of God's only-begotten Son. What a mystery is this! The God of heaven and earth assuming our nature, that in that nature he may expiate the guilt of a ruined world! We are accustomed to hear of this, and therefore hear of it without emotion: but what should we think of it, if it now reached our ears for the first time? Truly "Great is this mystery of godliness!" We, through unbelief and indifference, think little of it: but "the Angels," though infinitely less interested in it than we, "desire day and night to look into it," and to comprehend, if it were possible, the heights and depths of love that are contained in it[b].]

Consider it more particularly—

[Mark well the character of this salvation; its *freeness*, its *fulness*, its *suitableness!* It is as *free* as the light we see, or the air we breathe. It has come to us unsolicited, unsought: and it is given to us "without money and without price[c]." The whole world are invited to come to Christ as to an overflowing fountain, and to "take of the water of life freely[d]." So *full* is it, that it neither wants, nor is capable of, any addition. Nothing is left to be supplied by man: he gives nothing, but receives all. "All is treasured up for us in Christ[e]," "who is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption[f]." If only we are content to receive out of his fulness, we shall never lack any thing that is necessary either for our present

[b] 1 Pet. i. 12. [c] Isai. lv. 1. [d] Rev. xxii. 17.
[e] Col. i. 19. [f] 1 Cor. i. 30.

sent or eternal happiness[g]. And this is exactly such a salvation as is *suitable* to fallen man. If we were required to add any thing to what Christ has done and suffered for us, in order to render it sufficient for our salvation, what could we add? What have we of our own, but sin? The more any one knows of himself, the more he would despair, if any thing were required of him, as a price whereby to purchase an interest in Christ. Doubtless we must repent, and believe, and obey the Gospel, before we can be saved: but repentance, faith, and obedience, though necessary as means to an end, *merit* nothing at the hands of God; nor have we of ourselves any sufficiency for those things: even those graces are wrought in us by the Spirit of God, who "gives us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." Salvation, from first to last, is altogether of grace; and therefore it is equally suitable to all; to the thief when dying on the cross, as to Nicodemus, or Nathanael, whose whole life and conduct had been so exemplary, and who lived to adorn the doctrine they professed.

Contemplate *these things*, and say whether they contain not "wonders" that surpass the comprehension, both of men and angels? ———]

From the text however we may learn,

II. How we are to attain the knowledge of them—

Doubtless we must "search the Scriptures," and that with all diligence[h]. But, if we search them in dependence on our own wisdom, we shall never succeed. We must look up to God for the teachings of his good Spirit, even as David did, and pray, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

This is the way *prescribed by God*—

[God regards all men as blind[i], and incapable of comprehending spiritual things, till he himself has opened their eyes, and given them a spiritual discernment[k]———Hence he counsels all to come to the Lord Jesus Christ "for eye-salve, that they may see[l];" and to look to him as the only Author of true wisdom[m]. He represents it as the Holy Spirit's office to take of the things that are Christ's, and to shew them unto us[n];" and to bring home to the minds of men a clear perception of those various truths which are most of all interesting to their souls. He considers all men as equally under the necessity of submitting to the teachings of his Spirit[o]. The efforts of those who lean

[g] John i. 16. Gal. ii. 20.
[h] John v. 39.
[i] Rev. iii. 17.
[k] 1 Cor. ii. 14. Eph. iv. 18.
[l] Rev. iii. 18.
[m] Jam. i. 5.
[n] John xvi. 8, 11, 13, 14.
[o] John vi. 45.

lean to their own understanding, he derides[p], and will communicate to "babes the things which he conceals from the wise and prudent[q]." True it is, that God uses both the written and preached word as the means of conveying instruction: but the due reception of that instruction he ascribes to the operation of his own almighty power[r]. Even the Disciples whom Jesus himself had instructed for three or four years, were not able rightly to apprehend his word, till "he opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures[s]:" and, when Peter confessed his Lord to be the Christ, he was expressly told, that "flesh and blood had not revealed it" to him, but God himself[t]. Be it known then to all, that every Child of man, whether learned or unlearned, must "hear and learn of the Father," who is "the "Father of lights, and from whom cometh every good and perfect gift[u]."]

This is the way *pursued by the saints* in all ages—

[Who more instructed than David? yet he was not ashamed to seek from God a spiritual illumination. The saints at Ephesus were inferior to no Church whatever in a comprehension of Divine truth: yet did St. Paul pray for them, that they might yet further "be enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," through whose gracious influences alone they could grow either in knowledge or in grace[x]. If we look to those of later times, we find this truth acknowledged by all, excepting those infidels who "deny the Lord that bought them." The Reformers of our Church have most unequivocally sanctioned the use of these means, and encouraged us to look up to God for "the inspiration of his Spirit," "that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same[y]." Let us not be contented with any efforts of our own, or any instructions from man; but let us "cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, knowing that it is the Lord alone who giveth wisdom, and that out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[z]."]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who are studying the Holy Scriptures—

[It is surprising what pains many take to acquire a *critical* knowledge of the Bible, whilst yet they remain contentedly ignorant of those deep things which none but God can teach. But let

[p] 1 Cor. i. 19, 20. [q] Matt. xi. 25. [r] 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.
[s] Luke xxiv. 45. [t] Matt. xvi. 17. [u] Jam. i. 17.
[x] Eph. i. 17, 18.
[y] See Collects for First Sunday after Epiphany; and for Whitsunday.
[z] Prov. ii. 1—6.

let me intreat you to seek above all things to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, even that glory which He only who commanded light to shine out of darkness can make known unto you [z]———]

2. To those who, though incapable of entering critically into the letter of the Scriptures, have yet, through grace, a knowledge of the spiritual truths contained in them—

[Blessed be God, there are some amongst us, of whom, though unskilled in human knowledge, it may be said, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." "They were once blind; but now they see:" "They were once darkness; but are now light in the Lord." Be thankful to him who has so highly favoured and distinguished you [a]; and endeavour to walk worthy of him who has vouchsafed unto you this invaluable blessing [b]. If ye be "light in the Lord, then walk as children of the light" and of the day [c].]

[z] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [a] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. [b] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [c] Eph. v. 8.

## CCCCXX.

### THE WISDOM OF TRUE PIETY.

Ps. cxix. 34. *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

A SPIRITUAL discernment essentially differs from the mere exercise of our intellectual powers. A man may have the richest stores of human knowledge, and the most discriminating faculty in various branches of science, and yet be under the dominion, the allowed dominion, of his own lusts and passions. But spiritual knowledge is always accompanied with gracious dispositions: and for the sake of its practical effects alone is it to be desired. This appears from what St. Paul says respecting the intercessions which he continually offered before God in the behalf of his Colossian Converts: "We do not cease," says he, "to pray for you, and to desire that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; *that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* [a]." In a foregoing part of this psalm it might seem, as if knowledge

[a] Col. i. 9, 10.

ledge alone had been the end for which David desired a spiritual illumination: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." But we see in our text, that he had far other ends in view: he longed for knowledge, only that he might have his soul the more enlarged by it to run the way of God's commandments: "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

From these words we will take occasion to shew,

I. How true wisdom will operate—

The provisional engagement which David entered into was no other than what must necessarily result from an answer to his petition. If God give to any of us a spiritual understanding, we shall immediately begin,

1. To keep his law—

[Whatever God has revealed will be a law unto us. Has he bidden us *repent?* We shall humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes———Has he enjoined us to *believe* in his dear Son? We shall receive him into our hearts, and embrace him as all our salvation and all our desire———Has he commanded us to *obey* his precepts? We shall endeavour to search out his will, and to conform ourselves to it in all things———Whatever temptations may assault us, we shall not suffer them to turn us aside from the path of duty. Whatever opposition we may have to encounter, we shall hold on our way, determined to keep God's law, yea, to "keep it to the end[b]." This alone is true wisdom[c]; yea, this is the first beginning of wisdom in the soul[d].]

2. To observe it with our whole hearts—

[There are two things which a spiritual understanding will most assuredly teach us, namely, the beauty and excellency of God's law, and the folly of rendering to it a merely partial obedience.

To an unenlightened mind many of God's commands appear absurd: and men are ready to say of them, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" But, in the view of one who is taught of God, "there is no commandment grievous:" the scope of every thing which God has spoken, is, to produce the present and eternal happiness of his creatures: the language of every injunction is, Be holy, be happy———To attempt to lower

[b] ver. 112. [c] Job xxviii. 28. [d] Ps. cxi. 10.

lower any command to the standard of man's opinion, or of our own wishes, is seen to be the most horrible infatuation: for, if we can deceive man, we cannot deceive God: "TO HIM all things are naked and open." As he knows the extent of his own commands, so he knows the precise measure of obedience which we pay to them: "He weighs," not our actions only, but "our spirits" also.

Hence a partial obedience is the same kind of folly as if a man should request permission to take a poisoned cup, because it was sweet; or as if he should shut his eyes, and say, that no man can see him. Convinced of this, he begs of God to "put truth in his inward parts," and desires to be "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."]

As from a root which is acknowledged to be good we may anticipate a corresponding produce, so from fruit that is excellent we may infer with certainty the goodness of the root. In proof of this we will proceed to shew,

II. Wherein its operation will approve itself to every reflecting mind—

The observing of God's law with our whole hearts necessarily evinces the existence of true wisdom in the soul; because,

1. It is consonant with right reason—

[What is disobedience, but a preferring of the creature to God, the body to the soul, and time to eternity? And will any one say that *this* is reasonable, or that it has even a shadow of reason in it? Reason requires the very reverse of this: and the yielding up of our soul and body to God as a living sacrifice is expressly called "a reasonable service[e]." If we consider ourselves only as the work of God's hands, this kind of service is reasonable: but, if we consider ourselves as redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, it is infinitely more reasonable: for, "having been bought with a price, we are not our own, but are bound to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's."]

2. It is conducive to our best interests—

[We will concede, for argument sake, all that the slaves of pleasure can say in its behalf; yea, we will concede ten times more than its most infatuated votary ever ventured to assert: but, having done this, we will ask, What good will it all do you in a dying hour, and at the bar of judgment? "Godliness," we are told, "is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But of ungodliness

[e] Rom. xii. 1.

ungodliness no such thing can be asserted. Granting, that the ungodliness may be of the least offensive kind; yea, that it shall be so specious, as to assume the appearance, and to gain from many the applause, of piety; still we ask, What will it avail in the day that God shall judge the world? But it is not true, that the pleasures of sin are so great or so satisfactory. On the contrary, there is no comparison between the peace that flows from piety, and the gratifications that result from any criminal indulgence. "The work of righteousness is peace;" but "the way of transgressors is hard." And, as to the eternal world, there can be no doubt———Inasmuch then as piety is most consonant with right reason, and most conducive to our best interests, it approves itself, beyond a possibility of doubt, the genuine offspring of true wisdom.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who live in the allowed violation of any one commandment—

[The world may count you wise: yea, "if you are doing well unto yourselves, (that is, are advancing your own temporal interests,) all men will speak well of you[f]." But what does God say of you? "They have forsaken the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them[g]?" Ah! what indeed? To the rich man, whose heart was elated with his temporal prospects, God said, "Thou fool:" and no better character will he assign to you. Think only with what an eye the heart-searching God beholds you; or what the angels think of your conduct; or what you yourselves will think of it in a little time; and you will be at no loss to form a right estimate of it. If you would be truly wise in God's estimation, your obedience to him must be uniform and unreserved[h].]

2. Those who profess to be endued with true wisdom—

[If "God have given us an understanding," then we must evidence it by the purity of our hearts and lives. But many there are, who can talk very fluently and speciously about religion, who yet are very far from being wise in the sight of God. Hear the judgment of God himself on this subject: "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts (and these are no uncommon inmates with the professors of religion,) glory not, and lie not against the truth." (Let proud, conceited, and contentious professors hear this; They are "liars against the truth.") This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. "But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure,

[f] Ps. xlix. 18. [g] Jer. viii. 9. [h] Matt. vii. 24—27. Deut. iv. 6.

pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy[1]." Here is the test of true wisdom; here is the evidence of a sound understanding. The man that is destitute of these gracious tempers, is in darkness even until now: but the man who from love to Christ is enabled to live in the habitual exercise of them, has surely an understanding heart, and is made wise unto salvation.]

[1] Jam. iii. 13—17.

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## CCCCXXI.

### THE VANITIES OF THIS WORLD AN OBSTACLE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

Ps. cxix. 37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

THE depths of the human heart are never more plainly disclosed, than when a man comes into the presence of his Maker. Then he opens all his wants, and supplicates relief for all his necessities. The godly man at a throne of grace knows no dissimulation, no concealment, no false humility. What he speaks, (if he be in a right state) he feels. Let us then draw nigh, and listen to the breathings of holy David. He felt the ensnaring influence of worldly things, and the lamentable tendency of fallen man to relax his efforts in the service of his God: hence he poured out his soul in this humble supplication; "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

That we may all be stirred up to implore similar blessings at the hands of God, we propose to shew,

I. The fascinating power of earthly vanities—

By the word, "vanity," we understand all those things which are apt to engross the affections of carnal men. The Apostle classes them all under "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" and they all justly deserve the name assigned them in the text, because they are sure to disappoint the desires and expectations of all, who look to them for any solid or permanent satisfaction.

These

These things altogether captivate and enslave the minds of the generality—

[The natural man seeks nothing above them. His mind is not occupied with any thing above them. He "is in the flesh;" he "walks according to the flesh," "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." His "affections are altogether set upon things below, and not on things above." His thoughts, his conversation, his labours from day to day, all arise from, and terminate in, the things of time and sense: and from these things alone spring all his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows———]

These things also have great power over those who profess godliness—

[So our Lord has told us in the parable of the Sower. The thorny-ground hearers have made, in appearance at least, a great proficiency in religion. They have far surpassed the stony-ground hearers, who yet have heard the word with joy, and given many cheering and hopeful promises of a future harvest. They have been long established, and brought forth much which both they and others have deemed estimable fruit: but yet, "through the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, the seed that has grown up in them is choked, and they bring forth no fruit to perfection."

Even persons truly and deeply pious are in great danger from them; else why did our blessed Lord caution even his own immediate Disciples in those memorable words, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares[a]." There is yet an earthly and sensual spirit dwelling in the best of us, and working powerfully to counteract the better dictates of our new man[b]! and he knows little of his own heart, who does not see and bewail his own proneness to look back again after the flesh-pots of Egypt.]

But whilst we point out thus the danger of earthly vanities, we would point out also,

II. The way to escape their baneful influence—

We should set a guard upon all our senses—

[The senses are inlets to all manner of evil. Alas! alas! how often has the mind been contaminated by what it has either seen or heard! If it were no more than what we have read in books, or heard in conversation, that was calculated to encourage a worldly spirit, we should all feel abundant reason to lament, that we have not been sufficiently on our guard against the admission of bad impressions on the mind. But the vilest lusts have found an entrance into the heart by these avenues. Some have

[a] Luke xxi. 34. [b] Gal. v. 17.

have found to their cost, that one sinful idea, which they have either seen in a book or picture, or heard in conversation, has abode with them through life, when they have greatly desired to forget it; whilst hundreds of sermons which they would have been glad to have remembered, have passed from their minds like the early cloud. Behold David, the man after God's own heart; What reason had he to curse the day that he ever looked upon Bathsheba! ——— What reason too had Solomon's fool to lament that ever he listened to the voice of the enchanting adulteress[c]! It is not without reason that Solomon advises us not to look upon the wine when sparkling in the glass[d]. We must resist the very first entrance of sin into the soul; for it will operate like fire on a house of wood. Alas! "how great a matter does a little fire kindle[e]!" Its progress is very rapid: and who shall stop the conflagration, when once it is begun? "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death[f]." We exhort all then, like Solomon, to make a covenant with their eyes, and with their ears also, yea, and with the very imaginations of their heart; that neither their corporeal nor intellectual eyes become ministers of sin, or traitors to their souls.]

## We should cry earnestly to God for his effectual grace—

[God does and will preserve his people from evil, if they cry unto him. We should therefore call upon him both for his *preventing* and his *quickening* grace: we should pray, as David, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

There are many ways in which God will turn away our eyes "from beholding vanity." He will, if we are really seeking it at his hands, keep temptation from us. And how much we are all indebted to him for this, we shall never know, till we come to the bar of judgment, and have all his mercies unfolded to our view. Thousands of our fellow-creatures, who were once as respectable in every point of view as ourselves, have in an hour of temptation so fallen, as to destroy all their own honour and happiness through life. And why have not *we* done the same? Are we sure that we, if subjected to the same temptations as they, should not have done the same? Oh! if we are wise, we shall cry day and night, "Lead us not into temptation." But there are many other ways in which God can, and does, impart the same blessing. Perhaps he lays some affliction upon our loins, and visits us with some personal or domestic calamity. We are apt on such occasions to complain of the affliction; whereas, if we saw from what evils the visitation was

[c] Prov. vii. 6—23.
[d] Prov. xxiii. 31, 32.
[e] Jam. iii. 5.
[f] Jam. i. 15.

was sent to deliver us, we should be adoring God for it as the richest of all mercies. Let our distress be either in body or mind, who will not bless God for it, if it be the means of weakening the influence of worldly objects on his soul, and of keeping his eyes from beholding vanity? — — —

But, in addition to this, we should cry to him also for his quickening grace. However active we may be in the pursuit of earthly things, we all are too sluggish in our heavenly course. Nine times in this psalm does David cry, "Quicken me;" and ninety times nine do we need to renew the petition every day of our lives. Beg of God then to shew you more and more clearly the excellency of "his *way*" (even of that salvation which Christ has wrought out for us — — —), and the blessedness of the *end* to which it leads. This will quicken us more than any thing else. Let us see the excellency of *a life of faith;* and that will make us despise *the things of sense.* Let us also get *Pisgah views of the land of Canaan;* and we shall value nothing that can be offered us in *this dreary wilderness.* Look at Christ as the way, and Christ as the end; and you will soon "cast away the besetting sins that impede you," and "run with alacrity the race that is set before you[g]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Young people—

[Greatly do you need to offer the petition in our text. Oh! bear in mind what is *the true character of earthly things:* they are "*vanity*" altogether — — — Bear in mind *your danger from them:* they will ensnare, and, if the snare be not broken, destroy, your souls — — — Bear in mind *your need of Divine grace to counteract their influence.* It is God only than can preserve you: and, if not preserved by him, you will fall and perish — — —]

2. Those who make a profession of godliness—

[Think not that you are above temptation. Satan tempted even our blessed Lord himself, by "shewing him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." And you will he tempt in like manner. Nor imagine that you may not fall: for Demas was as eminent as any of you, and yet fell at last, through love of this present world[h]. In every Church the sad effect of worldly and carnal lusts is seen. You yourselves see it in others. Oh, beware lest it be seen in you also. It is your duty, and your happiness, to "be crucified unto the world, and to have the world crucified unto you[i]." You may use this world, if God have given it to you; but you must "so use it, as not to abuse it[k];" and so flee from all occasions of evil, that you may be "found of God at last without spot, and blameless[l]."]

[g] Heb. xii. 1, 2. [h] 2 Tim. iv. 10. with Col. iv. 14. & Phil. 24.
[i] Gal. vi. 14. [k] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. [l] 2 Pet. iii. 14.

## CCCCXXII.

### SERIOUS AND SPEEDY CONVERSION TO GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. cxix. 59, 60. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

AT what period of David's life these words were written, we are not informed: if in his early youth, they relate to his first conversion to God; but if in middle or more advanced life, they declare the daily habit of his soul. Under any circumstances they are very instructive. To young people they shew, that it is never too early to begin a life of entire devotedness to God. To those engaged in business of any kind, they manifest, that, whilst *in* the world, they should not be *of* the world, but in the midst of all their cares they should preserve their minds spiritual and heavenly. To the great and noble, yea, to princes and kings, they hold forth a solemn admonition to imitate the Jewish monarch, and to be as eminent in piety, as they are elevated above others in state and dignity. This *all* may learn from, that if ever we would find acceptance with God in the great day, we must turn to him,

I. With care and diligence—

Inconsideration is the source of almost all the evil that exists—

[Men will not give themselves the trouble to look back upon their past conduct. They take for granted, that all has been right, or at least not materially wrong; and that they have done nothing that calls for any particular humiliation before God. Of this the prophet Jeremiah complains[a]; as does our Lord also of the Jews in his day[b]. Nor will men take much pains to ascertain the path of duty in reference to what is future: they love rather to act from the impulse of the moment; nor have they any apprehensions that they shall offend God by any thing that they may do. "They do what is right in their own eyes," without inquiring whether it be right in God's sight, or not; or whether HE remembers it, or not[c].]

But

[a] Jer. viii. 6. [b] John iii. 19, 20. [c] Hos. vii. 2.

But we should compare our actions carefully with the word of God—

[The Sacred Volume is the only adequate standard of truth and virtue. If we satisfy ourselves with the opinions of men and the customs of the world, we shall be sure to err. We should take "God's testimonies," and try our ways by them. In particular, we should notice what God has testified to us in his Gospel; and see whether in our spirit and conduct we are such as he requires us to be. In this lies the vast difference between the standard of the world, and that of God: the world regards nothing but our outward conduct, and *that* chiefly in reference to the welfare of society; whereas God has respect to all our dispositions towards him and his Christ, and to all our motives and principles of action towards men. We should take the Scripture then as our touchstone; and see how far the whole habit of our minds accords with what is required of us there, and what we see exemplified in the primitive saints——Yea, we should set Christ himself before us, and try ourselves by the standard of his perfection———]

And, having ascertained what God's word requires, we should rectify our lives according to it—

[We must "turn," not our thoughts only, but "our feet" also, unto his testimonies. Having found out our past errors, we should humble ourselves for them; and determine, through grace, to run into them no more: and having discovered "the good old way," we should determine, through grace, to "walk in it." As for obstacles of any kind, we should not regard them. We should have it settled in our minds, that "the high-way of holiness" is the only road that will lead to heaven; and we should resolve, that, however narrow and unfrequented it may be, we will walk in it, even though earth and hell should conspire to obstruct our progress[d]——This is the advice given us by the voice of inspiration[e]: and to follow it is the duty, the interest, the happiness, of every human being[f].]

In this however there should be no delay: we should all address ourselves to this work,

II. With promptitude and decision—

Next to utter thoughtlessness is the evil of procrastination—

[There are none so blind as not to know that they have *some* occasion for repentance, or so hardened as to have formed a determined resolution that they will never repent. All have a faint purpose in their minds, that at some future period they will repent:

[d] Matt. vii. 13, 14. [e] Lam. iii. 40.
[f] Eccl. xii. 13. Luke x. 42.

repent: but then they put it off at present, in expectation of some "more convenient season." The young think that they have time enough before them, and that any great attention to religion is unsuited to their age. The busy are so engaged in their several concerns, that they think they may well be excused attending to religion, till a time of greater leisure. Every one finds some excuse for himself, and puts off the evil day, in hopes that some period will arrive when he shall be better disposed to the great work of turning unto God ———]

But it is folly and madness to defer this important work—

[*It must be done;* or else we inevitably and eternally perish ———*No man can call an hour his own.* "We know not what a day, an hour, a moment, may bring forth: whilst we are looking for days and years to come, God may say, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." *The difficulty of the work increases daily.* The force of habit is exceeding great: and the longer we fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, the more difficult it will be to mortify and subdue them ———. *We are in danger also of provoking God to withdraw from us all the assistances of his Spirit.* We may "grieve the Holy Spirit," yea, may "quench" also his sacred motions. God has said, "My Spirit shall not alway strive with man:" and if once he say respecting us, "Let them alone," our doom is sealed as surely as if we were already gone beyond redemption. *And how awful is the state of those who are taken unprepared!* What "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth" will they experience, cursing their own folly, and vainly wishing it were possible for them to have another opportunity afforded them for working out their salvation[g]!

Say then whether any man should defer one hour this necessary work! Surely we should "make haste, and not delay, to keep God's commandments[h]."]

That in this great work you may not miscarry, we would subjoin some useful ADVICE.

Cry mightily to God ———, and seek of him,

1. Impartiality in judging—

[Self-love always prompts us to form a favourable estimate of our own conduct. If we search at all, we search rather for excuses than for sins; for grounds of self-approbation, rather than of self-reproach. But what folly is this! God will form his estimate aright, whether we do or not; and by his own estimate he will judge us in the last day. Professors of religion, no less than others, are warped by self-love; and thousands there are whose

[g] Eccl. ix. 10. [h] See Heb. iii. 7—14.

whose spirit and conduct are directly at variance with the Gospel, whilst yet they boast of themselves as lights in a dark world ——— O search your hearts, as the Jews searched their houses for leaven, or as you would search a room for jewels which you had lost. You would not hastily shut your eyes, and say, There is no jewel here; but you would be examining every corner, to find as many as possibly you could; not content to leave so much as one undiscovered. If such impartiality were once exercised by us in detecting our sins, we should not be far from the kingdom of God.]

2. Fidelity in acting—

[Were a traveller, after long and laborious search, to find the true way to the place whither he was journeying, he would retrace his steps, and proceed in the path which led to the place of his destination. It might be less pleasant than his former path; but still he would walk in it. Say not then that a life of entire devotedness to God is difficult, or that the ways of Christ and his Apostles would make you singular, or require sacrifices on your part. Be it so: but still you must go forward: you must "not confer with flesh and blood:" you must give yourselves up, in body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord. You must strive to "walk altogether as Christ walked," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

3. Firmness in persevering—

[It is comparatively easy to *begin* well: the difficulty lies in *persevering*. The fear of death, or some strong impression on our minds, will operate for a time; but, if there be not a root of grace in us, we shall soon turn back to our evil ways. And, if we do that, we make our state really worse than it was before we thought of our ways at all[1]. O "be not weary in well doing." Make up your mind to encounter difficulties, and to endure hardships: and know that the *end* will richly repay for all the difficulties of the *way*.]

[1] 2 Pet. ii. 21.

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## CCCCXXIII.

### THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Ps. cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.*

THE perfections of God, if considered only in a speculative view, must excite our admiration; but, if contemplated in reference to our state and conduct,

duct, they will be to us a source of unspeakable comfort, and a spring of incessant activity. What emotions a knowledge of the Divine goodness will produce in the soul, we see in the words before us; in discoursing upon which we shall notice,

I. The goodness of God—

In conformity with the text, we shall call your attention to,

1. His essential goodness—

[This is not an indiscriminate regard to all, whether they be good or evil; for such a regard would not consist with justice, or holiness, or truth: but it is a general benevolence towards the whole creation, operating incessantly for the good of the whole. The manner in which it discovers itself is as various as the states of men; but, however diversified its operations may be, it is the same principle in God. It is the sum of all his perfections: towards the undeserving it is *grace*; and to the ill-deserving, *mercy*: to the indigent it is *bounty*; to the distressed, *pity and compassion*: towards the impenitent it is *forbearance*; and to the obstinate and incorrigible it is *justice*. This is the view which God himself gives us of his goodness[a]; and, in this view, it resides in him necessarily, in him only, and in him continually.]

2. His communicative goodness—

[This he manifests *to the world at large*. When first he created the world, he formed every thing "very good." And if we look around us, we shall be constrained to say, "The earth is full of his goodness."

*Towards man in particular*, his goodness is more abundantly displayed. Towards the ungodly he has shewn it, by giving his only dear Son to die for them, and his good Spirit to instruct them: yea, he has set apart an order of men also to intreat them in his name to accept the proffered salvation. Towards the godly he has abounded yet still more in the exceeding riches of his grace: for, in addition to all that he has done for the ungodly, he has made his word effectual for their conversion; and he watches over them with paternal care, supplying all their wants, and protecting them in all their dangers; and, to complete the whole, he will crown them finally with his glory[b].]

Such a view of God as this cannot but lead us to adopt,

II. The

[a] Moses prays for a sight of God's *glory*; God promises to shew him his *goodness*; and then represents it as consisting in an united exercise of all his perfections. Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. & xxxiv. 6, 7.

[b] Ps. ciii. 1—5.

II. The petition grounded upon it—

The petition itself is such as all ought to offer for themselves—

[By "the statutes" of God we understand both the truths he has revealed, and the precepts he has enjoined. Of these we are by nature ignorant; nor can we by mere human exertions ever acquire a right understanding of them[c]. We must be taught of God: our eyes must be opened by his Spirit: then only shall we keep his statutes, when God himself shall "write them on the fleshly tables of our hearts."]

But the petition has peculiar force as grounded on a discovery of God's goodness; for, in *that*, as in a glass, we see,

1. Our duties—

[The law of God primarily declares our duty towards him: but none ever attain a just knowledge of that duty from the law alone: they cannot see the necessity of loving God with all their hearts, till they have some idea of the obligations they lie under to him for the stupendous work of Redemption. But let the love of God in Christ Jesus be once clearly revealed to the soul, and the excellency of the law will instantly appear; and obedience to it will be considered as perfect freedom.]

2. Our defects—

[We are naturally averse to acknowledge our vileness and wickedness. But a sight of the Divine goodness softens the mind, and renders it ingenuous. Hence the more we are acquainted with God, the more we know of ourselves; and the more we have experienced of his love, the more we abhor ourselves for our ingratitude to him, and our want of conformity to his image[d].]

3. Our encouragements—

[Wherever we look, we have no encouragement but in God. Indeed, if only we be acquainted with his goodness, we want no other encouragement: for, what will not he do, who is so good in himself? and what will He refuse us, who has done so much for us already[e]? Such considerations as these are sufficient to counterbalance every difficulty that the world, or the flesh, or the devil can place in our way. Having this God for our God, we can want nothing for time or for eternity.]

[c] 1 Cor. ii. 14.
[d] Job xlii. 5, 6. Ezek. xvi. 63.
[e] Rom. viii. 32.

## CCCCXXIV.

### THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION.

Ps. cxix. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

DAVID had "been afflicted from his youth up" ——— and we think it highly probable that to that very circumstance he was indebted, under God, for those extraordinary attainments in devotion and holiness, which have rendered him a pattern for the saints in all future ages. By means of his trials he was constrained to take refuge in his God: and by constant communion with God, he obtained a deep insight into his revealed will, and a rich experience of his superabounding grace. This seems at least to have been his own view of the case, long after his afflictions had ceased: for to his familiarity with affliction he ascribes his enlarged acquaintance with the statutes of his God: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

In confirmation of his testimony, we shall shew,

I. The benefit of affliction, as leading to knowledge—

Affliction, in itself considered, is an evil: but, if viewed in connexion with the benefits resulting from it, it may justly be esteemed "a good." Thousands there are who have reason to bless God for it, as instrumental to the bringing of them to the knowledge of a Saviour, whom, without such trials, they would have continued to neglect. Indeed it is eminently and extensively useful in this view:

1. It opens our ears to instruction—

[People who are at ease, however eager they may be after human knowledge, have no desire after that which is spiritual and divine. If it be tendered to them, they reject it: if it be pressed upon them, they cast it behind their backs with indignation and scorn. To one who would instruct them in arts or sciences, they would feel thankful: but to one who would lead them to the knowledge of the true God, they make no return, but that of contempt and hatred[a].

But when heavy affliction is come upon them, they are softened:

[a] John iii. 19. Matt. vii. 26.

softened: they will listen to advice; they will even be thankful for it: they will read the Scriptures, or some other religious book: and will pay considerable attention to those subjects which hitherto have provoked only their derision.

With this view, and for the production of this very effect, God frequently vouchsafes to send it[b]: and those who are brought by it to this measure of thoughtfulness about their souls, have reason rather to be thankful for it as a benefit, than to complain of it as a judgment.]

2. It makes us sensible of our need of better things than this world can give—

[In the midst of carnal enjoyments a man wishes for nothing more: but when trials of various kinds oppress his mind, his taste for earthly gratifications is weakened: their insufficiency to remove, or even to alleviate, trouble is felt; and they no longer afford him that kind of satisfaction which they once did. Amusements, and company, have lost their relish: his mind is indisposed for them: they are become to him insipid, undesirable, irksome, odious. Something more substantial is now wanted: something on which his soul may rest, as conducive to its present and eternal welfare. This was the effect produced upon the Prodigal. Whilst he could revel in luxury and pleasure, he cared for nothing; but when his money was expended, and he was a prey to want, and could find no help, no pity, from man, then he began to reflect on the abundance that there was in his Father's house, and to desire a participation of it, though in the lowest and most menial office there. And had he not reason to be thankful for the trials which produced so blessed an effect? In like manner then we also should acknowledge as a blessing every trial that is sent us for the accomplishment of so good an end.]

3. It drives us to God in prayer—

[Those who never called upon God in the time of their prosperity, are often stirred up to seek him in a season of adversity. "In their affliction," says God, "they will seek me early[c]:" and to the same effect the Prophet testifies, "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured forth a prayer when thy chastening was upon them[d]." In the 107th Psalm this effect of troubles is marked in *every* instance: "Then cried they unto the Lord in their trouble[e]:" and in *every* instance this was the prelude to their deliverance. Who then that experiences this effect from his trials has not reason to be thankful for them? Let it only be said of us, "Behold, he prayeth;" and we shall have no cause for complaint, though we should have been struck blind,

[b] Job xxxvi. 8—10.
[c] Hos. v. 15.
[d] Isai. xxvi. 16.
[e] ver. 6, 13, 19, 28.

blind, like Saul, and had our blindness continued to the latest hour of our lives[f].]

4. It brings us to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus—

[Of itself, affliction cannot effect this; but when accompanied by Divine grace, it often does. Indeed where a willingness to receive instruction, and a desire after spiritual blessings are excited in the soul, and issue in fervent prayer to God, there we may reasonably hope that all spiritual blessings will flow into the soul. God will not suffer any to seek his face in vain. Even though, like Manasseh, we may have brought down God's wrath upon us by the most heinous iniquities, yet if we humble ourselves under his chastisements, and implore mercy at his hands, we shall, like him, be heard, and be made stupendous monuments of his power and grace[g]. Did *he* ever regret the sufferings by which he was thus brought to enjoy peace with God? Neither shall *we*, whatever trials may be made subservient to this blessed end.]

But will the end really compensate for the means used to effect it? Yes: and to prove that it will, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The blessedness of knowledge, though gained by affliction—

Such knowledge as we are speaking of, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, is indeed inestimable. Let us view it,

1. As compared with the price paid for it—

[It is said by Solomon, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Now as we have before spoken of affliction as the means of bringing us to the knowledge of the truth, we may, in popular language, call it, The price paid for knowledge. Whatever then the affliction be, we do not hesitate to say that it is richly recompensed by the fruit which it produces.

Suppose the affliction to be of *a temporal nature:* we have been bereaved of our dearest friends and relatives; we have suffered the loss of all our property, and been reduced to very embarrassed circumstances; our health also has been destroyed, so that we are sinking under an accumulation of woes. Suppose our case as distressing as that of Job himself: still, if it have been sanctified to our eternal good, we can call it by no other name than, A blessing in disguise. Did Job, when brought to a deeper view of his own depravity, and to a richer discovery of the Divine

[f] Acts ix. 3, 4, 8. [g] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.

Divine perfections, regret the sufferings which had been overruled for that end? Did he not rather abhor himself for having judged too hastily respecting the designs of God; and cordially approve of those dispensations, which in his haste he had been ready to condemn? Thus shall we also do, when once we have "seen the *end* of the Lord[h]." We may in our haste exclaim, "All these things are against me:" but at last we shall testify of all God's most afflictive dispensations, as Joseph did, that "God meant them for good[i]."

But suppose the trials to be of *a spiritual nature*. These are yet far more afflictive: "A wounded spirit who can bear?" How grievously David was oppressed by them, we are informed in many of his psalms[k] ——— But yet his testimony in our text was the real dictate of his heart. And we may ask of others, Were the wounds which brought you to the heavenly Physician too severe? Do you not number them amongst your richest mercies? Has not every loss been more than compensated in the acquisition of salvation; and every pang more than recompensed in the peace and joy to which, through the knowledge of Christ, you have attained? It was a matter of just computation with the Apostle, that "the sufferings of this present life (whatever they may be) are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."]

2. As estimated according to its own intrinsic worth—

[But who can ever rightly appreciate its worth? St. Paul "counted all things to be but dross and dung in comparison of it[l]." We must be able to estimate all the miseries of hell, and all the glories of heaven, before we can form any estimate of its value; and, if we could ascertain the full importance of those, we should still be as far as ever from having a complete conception of the worth of spiritual knowledge; unless we could estimate also all the glory that will accrue to the ever blessed Trinity from the contrivance and execution of this stupendous plan, and the application of this salvation to a ruined world.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those that are at ease—

[How faint, for the most part, are your desires after spiritual knowledge! Whether you hear, or read, or pray, what formality pervades it all! But, if God have indeed designs of love towards you, you will be taught by the rod, what you will not learn without: "He will cause you to pass under the rod, in order that he may bring you into the bond of the covenant." And if lesser trials will not accomplish the purposes of his grace, he will visit you

[h] Jam. v. 11. [i] Gen. l. 20.
[k] See Ps. xxxviii. 1—8. & lxxvii. 3—9. & lxxxviii. 6, 7. & cii. 1—10.
[l] Phil. iii. 8.

you with heavier: "from chastening you with rods he will scourge you with scorpions." Yet think not that a season of affliction is *in itself* favourable for the pursuit of spiritual knowledge: it is far otherwise: pains of body, and distress of mind, have a tendency to impede, rather than assist, the exercises of the mind. Ask those who are in deep affliction, Whether they find it easy to collect their thoughts, and fix them with energy on the concerns of their souls; and they will bear one uniform testimony, that health is the time to seek the Lord. Be persuaded then, now whilst you are at ease, to study "God's statutes," and especially those which declare to us the way of salvation ordained for sinful man. Know that there is no other knowledge of any importance whatever in comparison of this; and that, if even the most grievous sufferings should be welcomed as accessary to the attainment of it, much more must it deserve all the time and attention that can be bestowed upon it. You never need fear that you will hereafter have occasion to complain, that its fruits did not repay you for the cultivation of it.]

2. To those that are under any great affliction—

[The rod under which you suffer, has a voice, to which you should listen with all possible attention[m]. It is sent to you in love and mercy. God designs to teach you, by means of it, many things which you would not so well learn without it. It may be that you are already instructed in the Gospel of Christ; but yet there is much of which you are ignorant; and many things which you do know, need to be known by you in a very different manner. Even our blessed Lord himself, "though he was a Son, learned obedience by the things which he suffered," yea, and "was made perfect through sufferings." Be content to have God's work carried on and perfected in you in the same way: and be more anxious to obtain the benefit which your affliction is sent to impart, than to get rid of the affliction itself. If your tribulation work in you patience and experience and hope, learn to glory in it, and to number it amongst your richest blessings. And do not wait till the affliction is removed, to acknowledge God's goodness to you in sending it; but *now*, whilst you are under the affliction, get it so improved and sanctified to the good of your soul, that you may be able to say, "It is good for me, O Lord, that I *am* afflicted; for by means of it I *do* learn thy statutes:" I see, "it is in very faithfulness that thou afflictest me;" and, if only thou "make me a partaker of thy holiness," send me *what* thou wilt, and *when* thou wilt: be the cup never so bitter to my taste, I will say, "Not my will, but thine be done."]

[m] Mic. vi. 9.

## CCCCXXV.

### THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD.

Ps. cxix. 76. *Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word, to thy servant!*

THE peculiar construction of this psalm forbids us to look for much connexion between its several parts. It is composed of short detached sentences, committed to writing at different times as they occurred to the mind of the Royal penman, and afterwards reduced to a certain kind of order; eight of them beginning with the same letter through all the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. If however we take the words of our text as connected with the preceding verse, we must understand it as a prayer that a sense of God's loving-kindness might be given him to comfort him under his afflictions. This sense we shall not exclude; though we shall not entirely limit it to this: for, if we take the words by themselves, they contain some peculiarly important hints, which we are desirous to impress upon your minds.

In elucidating them, we propose to shew,

I. What the Scriptures speak respecting the loving-kindness of God—

They are full of this glorious subject: they declare,

1. That it is the one source of all the benefits we enjoy—

[Survey the lustre and use of the heavenly bodies, the rich fecundity of the earth, the structure of the human body, or the faculties of the soul; Whence do they proceed? Who is their author; and by what motive was he actuated in bestowing them upon us? Can they be traced to any other source[a]? ———]

2. That it is our chief support under all trials—

[We will grant something to philosophy; and acknowledge that it can fortify the mind in some degree: but it is not to be compared

[a] See John iii. 16. Tit. iii. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 7.

compared with religion in point of efficacy. *That* may silence murmurs, and produce a reluctant submission; but *this* will turn trials into an occasion of joy and glorying[b].]

3. That a comfortable sense of it is the privilege of all the Lord's people—

[God promises "his Holy Spirit unto all them that ask him." That Spirit shall be in them "a spirit of adoption," a witness, an earnest, a seal, a Comforter. From the days of Abel to the present hour, God has delighted to rejoice the souls of his servants by the testimonies of his love.]

But, if the loving-kindness of God be thus manifested to his people, it may be asked,

II. Why David prayed that it might be for his comfort—

He did so,

1. Because, without a sense of it, his trials would have been insupportable—

[David was exposed to many and severe trials: and, if he had not been favoured with peculiar supports, he would have sunk under them. This he often mentions[c]: and St. Paul also acknowledges his obligation to God for similar supports[d]. When such manifestations were withdrawn, even Jesus himself almost fainted[e]: but when they were vouchsafed, the weakest females were made triumphant over all the malice of their persecutors[f].]

2. Because, though all are partakers of it, all do not find it to their comfort—

[How many have the blessings of health and wealth, who taste nothing of God's loving-kindness in them, but make them the occasions of more flagrant opposition to his will! How many have been restored to health, who by their subsequent misconduct have turned that mercy into a real curse! Above all, how many have made Christ himself a stumbling-block instead of a Saviour, and "the Gospel a savour of death," when it might have been to them "a savour of life!" Thus would all men do, if they were left to themselves: even Hezekiah's miraculous recovery, and St. Paul's visit to the third heavens, would have issued only in their deeper condemnation, if God had not given grace to the one, and "a thorn in the flesh" to the other, to counteract the propensities of their fallen nature. Well then might David make this a matter of prayer to God, when none but God could impart to him this benefit.]

3. Because,

[b] Rom. v. 1—3. Acts v. 41. & xvi. 25.
[c] 1 Sam. xxx. 6. & Ps. cxvi. 3—5.
[d] 2 Cor. i. 3—5.
[e] Matt. xxvii. 46.
[f] Heb. xi. 35.

3. Because, if it be not to our comfort, it will be, in a most awful manner, to our discomfort—

[It is no light matter to abuse the merciful kindness of God. The day is coming, when every mercy we have received, must be accounted for; and when "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those" who have slighted a preached Gospel. Every mercy therefore should be received with a holy fear and jealousy, lest it should prove only an occasion of more aggravated guilt, and heavier condemnation.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us more frequently reflect on the loving-kindness of God[g]—Let us meditate on it especially in seasons of trouble[h]—And let us endeavour to requite it by devoting ourselves unreservedly to his service[i]—]

[g] Ps. xxvi. 3. & lxiii. 3. [h] Ps. cxliii. 78.
[i] Ps. cxvi. 12. & Isai. lxiii. 7.

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## CCCCXXVI.

### THE TRUE TEST OF RELIGION IN THE SOUL.

Ps. cxix. 128. *I esteem thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

RELIGION is the same in every age. The doctrines of it, though they have been more fully and clearly revealed under the Christian dispensation, have never varied in substance; nor has the practice of it ever changed, except in the observance of rites and ceremonies. To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves, was the essence of true religion in the days of Abraham and of Moses; and so it is at this day. Doubtless there can be no true religion where the Gospel is set at nought and despised: but the Gospel may be highly approved as a system, whilst the heart is far from being right with God. It is not by their profession of any principles that we are to judge of men's states, but by the practical effects of those principles on their hearts and lives. Our blessed Lord has established this as the only true criterion, the only adequate test; "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Now

Now the genuine fruit of piety is as clearly exhibited in the words before us, as in any part of the Inspired Volume: and the passage is peculiarly worthy notice, because in the writer of it were combined the fullest conviction of the understanding, together with the strongest affections of the heart: in his judgment, "he esteemed God's precepts to be right;" and in his heart, "he hated" every thing that was opposed to them.

May God of his infinite mercy inspire us with the same heavenly sentiments, whilst we consider these two things,—*The Christian character as here delineated*, and *The light which it reflects upon the Gospel of Christ!*

I. The Christian character as here delineated—

In the text is drawn a broad line of distinction between the Child of God, and every other person under heaven.

Christians are either nominal or real. Each class has gradations, from the highest to the lowest; but between the two classes there is an immense gulph, that separates them as far as the east is from the west. To ascertain to which of the two we belong, is of infinite importance; but self-love blinds our eyes, and renders the discovery of it extremely difficult. This Scripture however holds up, as it were, a mirrour before us; and, if we will look stedfastly into it, we may discern with great precision what manner of persons we are.

The difference between the two classes is this: the nominal Christian, however eminent he may in appearance be, is partial in his regard for God's precepts[a]; but the true Christian approves and loves them all without exception[b].

The nominal Christian, we say, is partial in his regard for God's precepts. He may esteem those *which countenance his own particular party*. The Papist, for instance, and the Protestant, will severally glory in those passages of Holy Writ which seem to justify their adherence to their respective modes of worship, and to afford them ground for believing that theirs is the more Scriptural and Apostolic Church. The various

[a] Mal. ii. 9. [b] Ps. cxix. 6.

various classes of Protestants also will manifest an ardent zeal for the support of their respective tenets, and be almost ready to anathematize each other, as not giving sufficient weight to those particular passages, on which they severally found their respective differences. They not only esteem their own grounds of faith "to be right," but they "hate" the sentiments opposed to them "as erroneous and false."

The nominal Christian may also love those precepts *which do not materially condemn him.* The man who is sober, chaste, honest, just, temperate, benevolent, may take a real pleasure in such passages of Scripture as inculcate the virtues in which he supposes himself to have excelled; and may feel an indignation against the ways, by which those precepts are grossly violated.

He may yet further delight in such precepts as, according to his interpretation of them, *afford him ground for rejecting the Gospel.* No passages in all the word of God are more delightful to him than such as these: "Be not righteous overmuch;" and "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" He has no fear lest he should not be *righteous enough*; nor is he very anxious to inquire what is implied in *walking humbly* with God: it is sufficient for him that these passages are, in his eyes, opposed to what he calls enthusiasm; setting aside the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus, and of a life of entire devotedness to his service: and his hatred of all passages that bear an opposite aspect, is in exact proportion to his zeal for these.

But, whilst such parts of Scripture are approved by him, does he love *all* that the Inspired Volume contains? Does he love those precepts which are *most sublime and spiritual?* No; it is no pleasure to him to hear of "setting his affections on things above," or of having "his conversation in heaven:" nor does it afford him any gratification to be told, that the measure of holiness which he must aspire after, is that which was exhibited in the Lord Jesus, whose example he is to follow in the whole of his spirit and

and temper, his conversation and conduct, "walking in all things as he walked."

Nor does he particularly affect those precepts which *require much self-denial.* "To crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," and to root out from his soul every evil, though it be dear to him "as a right eye," or necessary to him as "a right hand," and to have a compliance with these precepts as his only alternative between that and the taking his portion "in hell-fire," is no pleasing sound in his ears, notwithstanding it proceeds from the meek and lowly Jesus[c].

Least of all is he gratified with precepts that *strike at his besetting sin.* The proud man does not delight to hear the workings of pride delineated; nor the covetous man the evils of covetousness depicted; nor the gay and dissipated the folly of their ways exposed; nor the self-righteous man the delusive nature of his hopes declared. No, they are all ready to deride the statements that condemn their ways, just as the Pharisees derided our Lord, when he had unveiled their covetous and hypocritical devices; "The Pharisees were covetous (it is said), and they derided him." The hearts of these people rise against all such doctrines, and with no little bitterness they exclaim, "In so saying, thou reproachest us[d]."

The true Christian, on the contrary, approves and loves all the commands of God; both *those which are evangelical,* and *those which are moral.*

He loves those which are *evangelical.* It is no grief to him to be told, that he must renounce all dependence on his own righteousness, and rely entirely on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is rather with the most heartfelt delight that he hears those gracious commands, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;" "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" "Believe on me, and have everlasting life." "He esteems these precepts to be right;" he feels them to be exactly suited to his necessities: he knows, and is assured, that his own righteousness is only as "filthy

[c] Mark ix. 42—48. [d] Luke xi. 45.

"filthy rags;" and that in any other garment than the robe of Christ's righteousness, it is impossible for him to stand in the presence of a holy God. He sees also that this mode of justification before God is the only one which can consist with the honour of God's justice, and with the demands of his law. Hence whatever opposes this way of salvation, "he hates;" yea, he shudders at the very thought of claiming any thing on the ground of his own worthiness, saying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He thankfully traces all his mercies to the covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son; and to that covenant he looks, as "ordered in all things, and sure;" and from his inmost soul he says of it, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire."

Moreover, as the duty of coming to Christ, so the duty of "living altogether by faith in Christ," the duty of abiding in him as branches of the living vine, of receiving from his fulness continual supplies of grace and strength, and of "growing up into him in all things, as our living Head;" the duty, I say, of making him "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption," our ALL, and of glorying in HIM, and in him *alone*; all this is heard by the true Christian with ineffable delight: he would that Christ should have all the glory: he sees it to be "right," that He who came down from heaven, and died upon the cross to save him, and ascended up on high, and has all fulness treasured up in him for the use of his Church and people, and who dwells in them "as their very life;" I say, he sees it "right," that this adorable Saviour should "be exalted, and extolled, and be very high;" yea, that he should be on earth, as he is in heaven, the one object of our adoration, and the continual theme of our praise. And, whilst a blind and ignorant world are ready to blame his zeal for the Redeemer's glory as carried to excess, his constant grief is, that he cannot love him more, and serve him better.

Nor is the true Christian less delighted with the

*moral*

*moral* precepts, not one of which would he desire to have relaxed or moderated in the smallest degree. Instead of wishing them to be lowered to the standard of his attainments, or regarding them as grievous on account of their purity, he loves them for their purity[a], and would esteem it his highest privilege to be conformed to them. He is well persuaded, that they are all "holy, and just, and good:" and he loves them as *perfective of his nature*, and *conducive to his happiness*.

He loves them, I say, as *perfective of his nature*. For what is holiness, but a conformity to the Divine image, as sin is to the image of the devil? It was by transgression that man lost that resemblance to the Deity which was stamped upon him at his first creation; and it is by the new-creating influence of the Spirit quickening him to a course of holy obedience, that this resemblance is gradually restored. Conscious of this, he pants after holiness, desiring to "be changed into his Redeemer's image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord."

Nor does he love them less as *conducive to his happiness*: for sin and misery are inseparable, as holiness also and true happiness are. What is the language of every precept in the Decalogue? It is this: 'Be holy, and be happy.' Of this he is convinced; and he finds, by daily experience, that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward," and that "Wisdom's ways are indeed ways of pleasantness and peace."

At the same time, "he hates every false way;" every deviation from the perfect rule of righteousness is painful to him: he "hates it;" and hates himself on account of it. As a touch, which would scarcely be felt in any other part of the body, will occasion the severest anguish to the eye, so those thoughts or feelings which would be altogether unnoticed by other men, inflict a wound on his conscience, and cause him to go mournfully before the Lord of Hosts. Ask him on such an occasion, What it is that has caused

[a] Ps. cxix. 140.

caused him thus to mourn and weep? Is it that his God has required so much? No: but that he himself has attained so little. He wants to "be sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit;" and, could he accomplish the desire of his heart, he would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." This is the object of his highest ambition; and, when he finds, that, notwithstanding all his efforts, he still falls short of it, he groans inwardly, and says with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?"

Behold, then, the Christian's character as here delineated. To a superficial observer he may not appear to differ much from others; but to those who have had opportunities of discovering the real desires of his soul, he is a perfect contrast with the whole ungodly world. The very best of nominal Christians are content with low attainments, and plead for indulgences in those things which are agreeable to their corrupt nature. The more sublime and spiritual precepts they soften down to the standard of their own practice; and rather applaud themselves for their excellencies, than lothe themselves for their defects. The true Christian, on the contrary, will admit of no standard but that of absolute perfection: and, whereinsoever he falls short of it, as he does in his very best services, he lothes and "abhors himself in dust and ashes;" nor has he any hope of acceptance with God, but in the view of that atonement which was once offered for him on the cross, and of that blood which the Lord Jesus Christ once shed on Calvary to cleanse him from his sins. We mean not to say, that these defects are subversive of all the Christian's peace; for, if that were the case, who could possess any peace at all? The Christian, notwithstanding his imperfections, has "comfort in the testimony of a good conscience," and in an assurance, that his God will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" but he does not on this account *allow himself* in any sin whatever. The use he makes of his own corruptions is, to cleave the more stedfastly to

Christ

Christ as his only hope, and to watch and pray the more diligently, that he may be preserved from evil, and be enabled by Divine grace to endure unto the end.

Now this description of the Christian's character reflects, (as we proposed in the

IId place to shew,)

The most important light on the Gospel of Christ.

Three things it suggests to us; namely,

An answer to those who misrepresent the Gospel—
A reproof to those who would abuse the Gospel—and
A direction to those who would adorn the Gospel.

First, we may derive from hence *an answer to those who misrepresent the Gospel.* It has in all ages been a favourite argument against the Gospel, that it supersedes the necessity of good works, and opens the flood-gates of licentiousness. It was urged repeatedly against St. Paul himself; who on that account set himself to answer it with all imaginable care: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" And again, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?" To both these questions he answers with holy indignation, "God forbid!" And, when his enemies went so far as to *affirm,* that he gave men a licence to sin, saying, "Let us do evil that good may come;" he scorned to return any other answer than this, "Their damnation is just." And it were greatly to be wished, that those who now so confidently repeat these accusations against the followers of St. Paul, would reflect on the guilt they incur, and the danger to which, by such calumnies, they expose themselves. To this present hour the same objections are made to all those statements which resemble Paul's. If we deny to good works the office of justifying the soul, we are represented as denying the necessity of them altogether. Though these objections have been refuted a thousand times, and should be refuted ten thousand times more, the enemies of the Gospel will still repeat them with as much confidence as ever. Let them, however, look into

into our text, and see what David's principles were: Of all the Old-Testament saints, there was not one who more determinately sought to be justified by the righteousness of Christ without any works of his own, than he. Hear what is said of him by St. Paul, in confirmation of the very sentiments which Paul himself maintained; "To him that *worketh not*, but believeth in him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his *faith is counted for righteousness*: EVEN AS DAVID describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom *God imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin[f]." Here we have a full exposition of David's views respecting the Gospel. And how did these views operate on his soul? Did the idea of being justified by a righteousness not his own, a righteousness without works, a righteousness imputed to him, and apprehended solely by faith, did this, I say, make him regardless of good works? No: look at the text, thou Objector, and be convinced: look at the text, thou Calumniator, and blush.

Search, next, the writings of St. Paul, and see whether there was any difference in this respect between him and David? Was there in theory? No: for St. Paul affirms, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world." Was there in practice? No: neither David nor any other Saint ever made higher attainments in holiness than St. Paul: "he was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles."

Perhaps it will be said, that the professed followers of St. Paul differ from him in this respect; and that, whilst in speculation they adopt his doctrine, in practice they deny its sanctifying efficacy. That there are Antinomians in the world, we confess: there were in the days of Christ and his Apostles; some who called Christ, "Lord, Lord, whilst yet they did not the things which he commanded;" and some, who "professed

[f] Rom. iv. 5—8.

"professed to know God, but in works denied him." And it must be expected, that, corrupt as human nature is, such characters will be found in every age. But is such conduct the necessary result of these principles? Was it so in the Apostle's days? or is it so at this day? If justification by faith alone be necessarily productive of laxness in morals, whence comes it that a higher tone of morality is universally expected from those who maintain that doctrine, than from others? Whence is it that the smallest evils in such persons are more severely marked, than the most licentious courses of the ungodly world? We appeal to all who hear us, Whether, if a professor, and especially a preacher, of this doctrine were to demean himself in all things for one single day in the way that the generality of his own age and station live all the year round, the mouths of all who beheld him would not be opened against him as a hypocrite[s]? Whence should this be, if those who maintain the doctrine of justification by faith alone, represented it as liberating men from their obligation to good works? And how comes it, that the very persons who are complained of for the licentious tendency of their principles, should at the same time be universally condemned for the over-righteous sanctity of their lives?

To all, then, who misrepresent the Gospel, we would give this reply: "Look at David, and see what the effect of the Gospel had on him: look at Paul,

[s] It having been observed to the author, that the words "age and *station*" might be mistaken for age and *order*, and thus be supposed to aim at *the Clergy*, he judges it right to guard against any such misconception of his meaning. The scope of his observation is this: A Professor, and especially a Preacher, of the doctrines here referred to, is expected to be more strict in his conduct than others who deny those doctrines. And, whether he be young or old, or of the higher or lower orders of society, if he were to manifest the same worldly spirit, to avow the same worldly sentiments, to shew the same indifference to religion, and to indulge in the same latitude of conversation altogether, as *the generality* of others who are of the same age and rank of life do, he would be accounted most glaringly and grossly inconsistent. *Some*, notwithstanding their aversion to these doctrines, are more guarded in their spirit and conversation; but *the generality* are not: and therefore the author purposely limited his observations to "*the generality*."

Paul, and contemplate its effects on him: look at the uniform declarations of Scripture, and see what the life was of all the primitive Believers: nay, look only at the expectations which you yourselves have formed: for, if you see a professor of the Gospel act unworthy of his profession, you deem him inconsistent; which is a proof, that both the obligation to holiness is acknowledged on his part, and the performance of it is expected on yours; and consequently, that the Gospel is, by your mutual consent, "a doctrine according to godliness."

From the passage before us, we may, in the next place, offer *a reproof to those who would abuse the Gospel.* We have already acknowledged, and with deep grief we confess it, that there are some persons professedly of Antinomian principles, who are so occupied with contemplating what Christ has wrought out *for* them, that they cannot bestow a thought on what he has engaged to work *in* them. To speak of holiness, or any point of duty, they account low, and legal: yea, they think that Christ has by his own obedience to the law superseded the necessity of holiness in us; and that the whole work of salvation is so finished by him, that there remains nothing to be done by us, nothing of repentance for sin, nothing of obedience to God's commands, but solely to maintain confidence in the provisions of God's everlasting Covenant, and to rejoice in God as our God and portion.

Shocking as these sentiments are, they have been professed of late to a great extent; and many have been deceived by them: but, to shew how unscriptural they are, we need only refer to the character of David, as drawn in the words of our text: Does he discard the law as a rule of life? Does he pour contempt upon the precepts of God as unworthy of his notice? No: throughout all his Psalms he speaks of them as objects of his supreme delight: "O how I love thy law! all the day long is my study in it." "I love thy precepts above gold; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb." To the same effect St. Paul also speaks: "I consent unto the

the law that it is good:" and again, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man!" He does, it is true, speak of himself as "dead to the law;" and of the law as dead with respect to him; and from thence, that the marriage bonds, by which the law and we were formerly united, are for ever dissolved. But what use does he teach us to make of this liberty? Does he speak of it as freeing us from all moral restraints? No; but as a reason for our giving up ourselves henceforth in a marriage union to Christ as our second husband, *that we may bring forth fruit unto God*[h]. Now then, we would ask, Were David and Paul right? If so, what must we think of the sentiments of these deluded people? Are they more spiritual than David? or have they a deeper insight into the Gospel than Paul? The very circumstance of their discarding all the exhortations of St. Paul, and casting behind them all his practical instructions, demonstrates, that they are, for the present at least, "given up to a delusion, to believe a lie." Some of them, we trust, do not practically live according to these principles; and, where this is the case, we hope that God, in his mercy, will sooner or later give them to see their errors: but, if they practically carry into effect their principles, they will have reason to curse the day that ever they were born.

To the younger part of our audience we will beg permission to suggest a few hints on this important subject.

You, when you go into the world, will be in danger of being ensnared by people of this stamp. There is something very imposing in the idea of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, and of making him "all in all." The devout mind is delighted with this thought; and is easily induced to regard with jealousy any thing that may be supposed to interfere with it. But be not wise above that which is written; and let nothing tempt you to imagine, that you can honour Christ by setting aside any of his commandments. It is by your love to his commandments that you are to approve

[h] Rom. vii. 1—4. with Gal. ii. 19.

approve yourselves his Disciples; and however delighted you may be with the visions of Mount Tabor, you must never forget that you have work also to do in the plain[i]. We are far from wishing any one to be working from self-righteous principles, or in a legal spirit: nor would we utter a word that should discourage the fullest confidence in God. It is our privilege, doubtless, to trace all our mercies up to his everlasting love, and to view them all as secured to us by covenant and by oath[k]: but then it is no less our privilege to fulfil God's will, and to resemble the holy angels, of whom it is said, that "they do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word." Beware then lest ye ever be led off from this ground. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the propitiation for your sins, as your all-prevailing Advocate, and as your living Head: but, whilst you believe in him, and love him, and rejoice in him, let your faith, and love, and joy, stimulate you to a holy and unreserved obedience. If he has "set your heart at liberty," let the effect be to "make you run with more enlargement the way of his commandments."

Lastly, we may derive from our text *a direction to those who would adorn the Gospel.* "Esteem *all* God's precepts to be right, and hate *every* false way." If God has enjoined any thing, do not ask whether the world approves of it; nor, if he have forbidden any thing, inquire of the world, whether you shall abstain from it. The world are as inadequate judges of Christian morality, as they are of Christian principles: both the one and the other are "foolishness to the natural man." Of all the sublimer precepts, whether evangelical or moral, they are ready to say, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" But let no true Christian "consult with flesh and blood." Let him rather say with David, "Away from me, ye wicked: I will keep the commandments of my God." Does God call you to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him?" or, Does the Lord Jesus Christ bid you "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach;" and

[i] Luke ix. 33, 37. [k] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

and readily to "lay down your lives for his sake?" Let "not these commandments be grievous in your eyes;" but rather "rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake." If at any time you be urged to turn aside from the path of duty, do not let the maxims or habits of the world bias you one moment: you are "not to follow a multitude to do evil:" if a thing be right, you should love it and cleave to it, though the whole world should be against you; just as Noah, Daniel, and Elijah did: and, if a thing be evil, you must not do it, though the loss of all things, yea even of life itself, should await you for your integrity. It were better far to go into a fiery furnace for your stedfastness, than to save yourselves by an undue compliance.

Doubtless this holy walk and conversation will involve you in the charge of singularity; but whose fault is it, if this conduct makes you singular? Is it yours? Is it not rather theirs, who will not yield obedience to the precepts of their God? We mean not by this to justify any who would affect a needless singularity; far from it: it is only where the world are wrong, that we would recommend any to separate from them. But wheresoever they are wrong, there you must "quit yourselves like men," and shew them by your example a more perfect way. In important matters, the whole universe should not shake your resolution. Where duty evidently calls, you must be firm, and "faithful unto death." It is confessedly "a strait and narrow way" in which you are called to walk; and, whilst walking in it, you must of necessity, like Noah, "condemn those" who are walking in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction[1];" and consequently, like him, you must incur the scorn and hatred of an ungodly world. But it is better far to brave the hatred of the ungodly, than to participate in the lot that shortly awaits them.

To all, then, who would "adorn the doctrine of our Saviour," we beg leave to offer this plain and salutary direction: "Let your light shine before men;" and let

[1] Heb. xi. 7.

let it shine so bright, as to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and to "make those ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." Labour habitually to do this in every thing that relates either to God or man. Let your enemies, if possible, "have no evil thing to say of you;" nothing to lay hold of; nothing that shall give occasion for that malignant triumph, "There, there, so would we have it." Be jealous for the honour of Christ and his Gospel. Remember that the world, who are blind enough to each other's faults, will be eagle-eyed in discerning yours; while they will make allowances enough for each other, they will make no allowances for you: and whilst they impute each other's frailties to the weakness of human nature, they will impute yours to the principles you profess. Be careful then to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you." Watch over your whole temper, and spirit, and conduct; that "your conversation may be altogether such as becometh the Gospel of Christ:" and "let your light be like that of the sun, shining more and more unto the perfect day." In a word, "be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

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## CCCCXXVII.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S CHIEF DESIRES.

Ps. cxix. 132, 133. *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

TO many, the Psalms are less interesting than most other parts of Scripture, as having in them a less variety of incident whereon to ingraft instruction, as also a less measure of plainness in the instruction they convey. But, whatever may be wanting in them in these respects, it is more than compensated by the piety of sentiment and ardour of devotion which

which pervade them all. If other parts of Scripture add more to our stock of knowledge, this produces a more elevated tone of feeling, and, if deeply studied, tends in a pre-eminent degree to bring the soul into communion with its God, and to prepare it for the enjoyment of the heavenly world. Let us but get the spirit of the Psalmist in the prayer before us, and we shall have no reason to complain that we were not amused with curious speculations, or edified with matters of deep research.

Our business on the present occasion will be quite simple, namely,

I. To explain the petitions here offered—

Two things the Psalmist here implores of God;

1. The manifestations of his mercy—

[Mercy is that which every Child of Adam needs: he needs it too, not merely for some particular violations of God's law, but for every action of his life: there is iniquity even in his holiest things: his very tears need to be washed, and his repentances to be repented of. Hence he must from the very beginning to the end of life, and in reference to every moment that he has lived, implore mercy at the hands of the heart-searching God———

In this request he sets, as it were, before his eyes all the instances of mercy which God has shewn to his most-favoured people from the foundation of the world. We may indeed understand his words as a general kind of plea taken from the wonted goodness of God to others: and then this petition will accord with that offered in another psalm, "Remember me with the favour which thou bearest unto thy chosen; O visit me with thy salvation[a]!" But there seems here a more specific reference to some particular exhibitions of God's mercy in the days of old; multitudes of which must of necessity present themselves to his mind, whenever his attention was directed towards them. What mercy had God shewn to Adam, in promising a Saviour to him, instead of inflicting on him the judgments he had so deeply merited! What mercy to Abel also, in giving him such manifest tokens of his favour! To Enoch also, in affording him such constant access to him, and in translating him to glory, without ever suffering him to taste the bitterness of death! In like manner his mercy to Noah, in delivering him from the deluge which overwhelmed the whole world beside; and to Abraham also, whom he admitted to all the familiarity of a most endeared friend. These, and many other instances, we may suppose to have been

[a] Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

been in his mind, when he proposed them to God as patterns of the mercy which he himself desired to partake of.

This is the true way in which every Child of God should pray. From all that God has done for his saints in former times he should take encouragement, and should enlarge his expectations to the utmost extent that the Sacred Records authorize. God is the same gracious and almighty Being in every age: and what he has done for one he may do for another: and though he may not vouchsafe to us precisely the same interpositions as he did to others, he will as far as our particular occasions may call for them: and we are enemies to ourselves, if we do not open our mouths wide, and ask all that our situation and circumstances can require.]

2. The communications of his grace—

[He desired to be delivered, not from guilt only, but from the power and dominion of sin also. This desire was without reserve: he wished not to retain "*any* iniquity," however pleasant or profitable, or even justifiable it might be in the eyes of an ungodly world. In this he approved himself sincere and upright: and in this, every true Christian will resemble him———

But in order to this, he begged to be guided altogether by the Oracles of Truth. The Word of God is the only standard of right and wrong: if we follow any other directory, we shall err: if we adhere to that, we cannot but fulfil the will of God. This is the constant declaration of God himself[b]; and it accords with the experience of his people in every age[c]. Happy would it be for us, if we would study the Scriptures with this particular view. We are not disposed to undervalue speculative knowledge: but that which is practical is infinitely to be preferred. The Scriptures are given us as a "light to our paths" in general, and as "a lantern" in every particular case, when we know not where to place "our feet." Let us truly seek to be in every thing governed by them; and then, though we be mere fools, as it were, in other things, we shall never greatly err[d].]

From this general view of the petitions, we proceed,

II. To shew the instruction to be derived from them—

Though not written with a didactic view, they convey much instruction, in reference both,

1. To Christian principles—

[The *union* of the two petitions may not improperly suggest to us, that a desire after pardon must invariably be joined with a desire of sanctification also. Were a desire of pardon all that is required to form the Christian character, a Christian would differ but

[b] ver. 9. [c] ver. 11. [d] Ps. xix. 7. Isai. xxxv. 8.

but little from those who are gone beyond redemption. Sin must be hateful to us, even as it is to God himself, who cannot look upon it without the utmost abhorrence———

Nor is the *order* in which they stand devoid of good and useful instruction. Mercy is to be sought *in the first place*. To look for sanctification first, and make that a ground whereon to hope for mercy, would subvert the whole Gospel of Christ. We mean not to say, that we should build such an observation as this on the mere circumstance of the petitions occurring in that particular order; for that circumstance would by no means justify any such conclusion: but from that circumstance we may fitly take occasion to make such an observation which is sanctioned and confirmed by every part of the inspired writings. And we cannot too strongly impress it on the minds of all, that in constructing the spiritual edifice, we must ever be careful to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure, and to assign to each its appropriate place and office———]

2. To Christian practice—

[Here the just improvement of the petitions is clear and obvious: they teach us to be *humble* Christians, *practical* Christians, *consistent* Christians.

We should be *humble* Christians. The manner in which the petition for mercy is expressed conveys an idea of deep humility. It is as if he had said, "Lord, I am unworthy that thou shouldst look upon so unworthy, so vile a creature as I am: well might my sins provoke thee to hide thy face from me for ever: but oh! look upon me, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." Thus it is that we should ever seek for mercy. It is impossible for us ever to lie too low before our God. To the latest hour of our lives we should preserve the spirit of the publican, who, whilst he sought for mercy, "dared not so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner!"———

We should also be *practical* Christians. To think that we can be interested in the mercy of God whilst we are continuing in sin, is a horrible, a fatal delusion. Let not any one entertain such an idea for one moment. Christ's work is finished indeed as it respects *himself*; but not as it respects *us*: there is a work to be wrought *in* us, as well as that which has been wrought *for* us: and whatever we may imagine about the secret purposes of God, this is revealed as an immutable decree, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord"———]

To crown the whole, we must be *consistent* Christians. To harbour *any* sin, of whatever kind it be, will prove us hypocrites. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will never hear us," never accept us. The right hand or right eye must be sacrificed, as well as those sins which may be more easily put away——— O let us seek to be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile," and to be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"]

## CCCCXXVIII.

### DAVID'S DESIRE TO SERVE GOD.

Ps. cxix. 145—148. *I cried with my whole heart; Hear me, O Lord! I will keep thy statutes: I cried unto thee; Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

IN reading the Psalms of David, we are of necessity led to contemplate the constant spirituality of his mind, and the extraordinary fervour of his devotions: but we are apt to overlook, or to notice only superficially, one of the most lovely features in his character, namely, his ardent desire to fulfil the whole will of God. If we were to read the psalm before us in this particular view, we should be surprised, that we had not been more forcibly struck with this sentiment before. He begins the psalm by declaring those persons pre-eminently blessed, who are most distinguished by their obedience to the laws of God[a]. In this way alone had he any hope of avoiding shame and disappointment in the last day[b]; and therefore he prayed with all imaginable earnestness, that he might be kept from ever deviating from the path of duty[c], and be enabled to "run the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart[d]." The words which we have just read do not, on a superficial view, convey this idea very strongly to our minds: but on a closer inspection of them, we shall see, that a desire to serve and honour God was the primary object in his petitions, and that even salvation itself was chiefly sought by him on account of the sanctifying and transforming efficacy with which it would be accompanied. Bearing this in mind, we will notice,

I. The object of his desires—

There is no reason to suppose that David alludes to any particular distress or difficulty in these petitions: he seems rather to refer to the whole work of

[a] ver. 1, 2. [b] ver. 6. [c] ver. 10, 19, 20. [d] ver. 32.

of grace and salvation, which he wished to have forwarded in his soul: and he does not merely *engage* to make a practical improvement of the grace that shall be given him, but rather *expresses the satisfaction he felt in looking forward to its effects.* Had he merely prayed to God for the salvation of his soul, we should not have disapproved his petitions; because it is proper and necessary for every man to seek above all things the salvation of his soul. But the having such respect to holiness, and the desiring of salvation itself chiefly in reference to that, is a higher style of piety; as we propose more distinctly under this head to shew.

1. It argues a nobler disposition—

[A desire after salvation does not of necessity imply any real love to God. A slave may wish to escape the lash of his master, and yet have no delight in his service: and we also may seek deliverance from condemnation, without any ingenuous feelings towards God. Simon Magus desired the intercessions of Peter and John in his behalf; but he was actuated by no better motive than a fear of the judgments denounced against him[s]. But when a person desires to attain the Divine image, and makes the glorifying of God, by a holy conversation, the main object of his pursuit, he shews a nobility of mind, and an enlargement of heart, which none but God can bestow. A man by the mere force of natural selfishness may long for pardon; but no man without supernatural grace can pant after real holiness.]

2. It shews juster views of the nature and source of true happiness—

[If a man were pardoned, he could not be happy, if he were not holy: for sin would ever eat as a canker, and destroy his peace ——— Even heaven itself would be no heaven to one who was not possessed of heavenly dispositions: for what communion could he have with the glorified saints and angels, all of whom are holy as God is holy, and perfect as God is perfect? The angels are represented as ever "fulfilling God's will, and hearkening to the voice of his word," with an ardent desire to follow the very first intimations of the Divine pleasure. The saints also "rest not day nor night, singing" with all their powers the praises of their most adorable Redeemer. But how would such an occupation suit those who have no preparation of heart for it? But a disposition to execute the will of God will make a person happy in every situation. If he be bereft of all outward

[s] Acts viii. 24.

outward comforts, he will "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience:" so that the person who desires holiness in the first place, proves that his judgment is well informed; and that he justly appreciates that important saying; "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."]

3. It most corresponds with the ends which the Governor of the Universe proposes to himself in all his dispensations—

[God in creating all things formed them for his own glory; as it is said, "For thy glory they are, and were created." In all the works of his providence also he has designed to bind men to himself in a way of uniform and unreserved obedience. This was especially his end in all that he did for the Israelites in the wilderness; he did it, "that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws[f]." In the great work of Redemption he had the same blessed object in view, namely, "that we might serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life[g]." "This people have I formed for myself, that they may shew forth my praise." Now in desiring salvation for holiness sake, and in praying for deliverance from all the bonds of sin, in order to "run with more enlarged hearts the way of God's commands," we forward the everlasting counsels of the Deity, and prove ourselves, in the most important of all concerns, like-minded with God.]

The worthiness of his object was justly marked by,

II. The ardour of his pursuit—

This blessed object he sought,

1. In fervent and continual prayer—

[Observe his own account: "I cried, I cried, I cried;" I cried "with my heart," with "my whole heart." What can we conceive more expressive than such language as this? Yet we are sure he did not exaggerate, or state any thing that was not strictly true. Moreover, so ardent was his mind in these holy exercises, and so great his delight in them, that he "prevented the dawning of the morning," and rose often while it was yet dark, in order to pour out his soul before God.

Now this shews us how the renovation and salvation of the soul should be sought by every Child of man. It should occupy our whole mind; it should engage our whole soul. To seek it in a lukewarm and listless way, is to shew that we have no just value for our souls, and no real delight in God. Examine, we beseech you, beloved Brethren, how it is with you in this respect — — — for

[f] Ps. cv. ult. [g] Luke i. 74, 75.

for ye may as surely know by this the state of your souls before God, as if ye were to look into the very book of God's remembrance — — — You must distinguish also carefully between the exertions that are made in your own strength, and the efforts which are made in prayer to obtain help from God. It is from these that you must judge of your self-knowledge, and humility, and dependence upon God: for in proportion only as you feel your own weakness, and his readiness to aid you, will your application to him be such as David's was — — —]

2. In a believing dependence on God's word—

[The word of God meditated on, and applied to the soul by faith, is the great support and encouragement of all who desire mercy at God's hands: and David "prevented the night watches" in order to read it, and meditate upon it, and pray over it. Thus it should be with us also. Oh then let me ask, Is the blessed word of God the one rule of your desires, and the one ground of your expectations? and in this view is it your meditation day and night? — — — Here again you may obtain an insight into the state of your souls, and learn to estimate with precision your spiritual attainments. You may, as Biblical Students, be extremely diligent, consuming the midnight oil, and labouring all the day, without being at all nearer to God than those who never look into the Sacred Records. The question is, Whether you lay hold of it as a word of promise from God to you, and whether you plead it day and night before God in prayer? — — — This will prove you Christians indeed; more especially if the promises of grace for your sanctification be as dear to you as the promises of mercy for your pardon and acceptance. This is the habit of mind which God approves, and which will assuredly issue in everlasting salvation — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. How have your minds hitherto been exercised in relation to eternal things?

[Have you thus redeemed time, even from your sleep, for the purpose of forwarding with all possible earnestness the welfare of your souls? — — —]

2. What are your views and purposes respecting them in future?

[Are you procrastinating, and wasting your time in indolent habits or worthless pursuits? — — — Oh! awake from your slumbers: up, and be doing: and the Lord be with you!]

## CCCCXXIX.

### BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD'S LAW.

Ps. cxix. 165. *Great peace have they who love thy law; and nothing shall offend them.*

THE force of principle is exceeding great, even where the principle itself is erroneous and vicious, but much more where it is founded upon the unerring word of God. It produces in our conduct, promptitude, uniformity, decision: and, whilst it stimulates to action, it supports the mind in case of failure and disappointment. Now of all principles, that of love to God and to his revealed will is the strongest. We see in the saints of every age what wonders it is able to effect——In the words before us, David informs us what peace it will bring into the soul, amidst the heaviest trials, and what stability amidst the greatest difficulties. But for the more full elucidation of his words, we will consider,

I. The character here described—

"The law of God" generally throughout the Psalms means the whole revealed will of God. It is not to be confined to the moral, or the ceremonial law; it comprehends the Gospel also: it is "the law which should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" even, as St. Paul calls it, "the law of faith."

To "love" this law is a strong expression, importing much more than a mere obedience to it: for we may conceive persons to obey it through fear; whereas those who love it, see an excellency in it, and cordially approve of it in all its parts. They love it,

1. As a mirrour of truth—

[In this view it is spoken of by an inspired Apostle[a]; and it is justly so represented, because it reflects with perfect fidelity every feature of the human heart. It never flatters, never distorts; but shews, to every one who will look into it, precisely what character he bears in the sight of the heart-searching God. An insincere person does not like it; he turns away from it: he will not come to it, because it presents to his view his own deformities.

[a] Jam. i. 23—25.

mities. But the true Christian loves it on this very account. He desires to know the worst of himself. He sees that it will be to no purpose for him to deceive his own soul: he is assured, that God will not form his estimate according to the partial views which he himself may take: and therefore he desires to see himself just as God sees him. True it is, that he never looks into this glass without finding deeper and deeper cause for humiliation ———but still he loves it; yea, he loves it *on this very account*; even as David did, when he said, "Thy word is very pure; *therefore* thy servant loveth it."]

2. As a revelation of mercy—

[In this view it is particularly delightful to him. The plan of salvation which it unfolds is so grand, so wonderful, so suitable in all its parts, and so sufficient for all his necessities, that he can never sufficiently admire it——— It is his meditation, and his song, all the day. The Scripture represents the Gospel as "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined:" and such indeed he finds it to his soul. In comparison of it, and of the knowledge of it, he "counts all things in the universe but dross and dung"———]

3. As a rule of life—

[From the moment of his having found the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer, the one desire of his soul has been to "live to Him who died for us and rose again." "What wilt thou have me to do?" has been his constant inquiry at the throne of grace: and he delights exceedingly in this word as a sure directory under every situation and circumstance of life. From day to day he reads it with this particular view, that he may know "how to walk and to please God." He perceives that men are always endeavouring to lower the requisitions of this law: but he strives rather to have his attainments raised to that perfect standard. Not one of all its commandments is regarded by him as grievous. Nothing is grievous, but his own want of conformity to them. Could he have his heart's desire, it would be to "walk in all things as Christ walked," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"———]

In proportion as this character exists in any, is,

II. The blessedness of those in whom it is found—

This, as might well be expected, is exceeding great. We notice it in two respects;

1. The happiness of their minds—

["Peace," in the Scripture use of the term, is not a mere absence of trouble, but an actual state of very sublime enjoyment. The person "who loves God's law," in the way before described, has,

has, as the very first-fruits of his faith in Christ, *a sense of reconciliation with God*: "being justified by faith, he has peace with God: God has said to him, both by his word and Spirit, "Peace, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Combined with this he has *the testimony of a good conscience*. Though he sees nothing in himself but what furnishes him with grounds for humiliation and self-abasement, he cannot be insensible of the change that has been wrought in him: he dares not deny the work of God in his soul. He has the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the testimony of his own spirit, concurring to assure him, that "old things have passed away within him, and all things become new:" and though he cannot attain that measure of perfection that he aspires after, he is conscious that if he could, he would be "pure as God is pure," and "perfect as God is perfect." *His daily and hourly employment* brings in an abundance of peace to his soul. He is engaged in doing what he believes to be the will of God; and he finds by sweet experience the truth of that saying, "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever[b]." Nor has he less comfort in *looking forward to the eternal state*. He is not left to be a prey to fears and apprehensions about his future destiny. He knows in whom he has believed, and that his God and Saviour is able to keep him unto that great and awful day: He sees also, that he has in Christ a right and title to the heavenly inheritance; and that, "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Hence, instead of dreading the approach of death, he looks forward to it as the consummation of all his wishes, and the completion of all his happiness; and "desires to depart, that he may be with Christ." Such is the peace which it is the privilege of all who love the Gospel to enjoy, and which Christ himself has left them as a most invaluable legacy, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you:" and verily it is "a peace which passeth all understanding."]

2. The stability of their goings—

[Those who have not this divine principle within them, are liable to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, and to be "moved from their stedfastness" by every temptation. But not so the true Christian, in whose heart the law of God is engraved. He, though still assaulted with manifold *temptations*, is enabled to withstand them all. At the very moment of the assault, he says, with Joseph, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" And throughout the whole course of his life he experiences, on the whole, the truth of that promise, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way

[b] Isai. xxxii. 17. See also Ps. xix. 11. & Prov. iii. 17.

a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it[c]." If he be tried with the most formidable *persecutions*, he does not, like the stony-ground hearers, presently desist from following the Lord, but takes up his cross manfully, and makes up his mind to suffer the loss even of life itself, rather than dishonour and deny his Lord. Be his trials ever so numerous, he says concerning them, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me:" "I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die, for the Lord's sake." Perhaps one of the greatest stumbling-blocks which lie in the way of the sincere, is *the fall of many who once appeared to run well*. These in their fall sweep away, as it were with their tail, many, very many, of the stars of heaven[d]. But those who truly love God's law are fixed as the sun in the firmament[e]. They know that the truth and excellence of religion does not depend on those who profess it; and therefore, whatever be the conduct of others, he determines, through God's assistance, to hold it fast even to the end. Thus does he surmount the obstacles which sin and Satan place in his way; and is finally "made more than conqueror through Him that loved him."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who possess not this character—

[It is indeed a great thing to love God's law. Let not any imagine, that a general approbation of it is that which will either satisfy God, or bring peace into the soul. We love it not aright, if we do not love it *universally*, in every thing that it requires, and *supremely*, above all that the world can give or take away. Nor let any one who does not *thus* love it, expect peace to his soul; for God has said that there is no peace unto him[f]: nor can he have stability, seeing that he is in darkness even until now[g]. You must inquire for the good old way, and walk therein, if ever you would taste this inestimable blessing[h]———]

2. To those who, whilst they profess to have attained this character, enjoy not the blessings connected with it—

[God's word is true; nor shall any who trust in it be disappointed of their hope. Hear his sayings[i]——— and, if you experience not the accomplishment of them in your own souls, know that the fault is in yourselves alone. As sure as ever the character is yours, so most assuredly shall the blessedness also be. "He *will* keep his saints" in peace and holiness, even to the end[k].]

[c] 1 Cor. x. 13. [d] Rev. xii. 4. [e] Ps. lxxii. 5.
[f] Isai. lvii. 20, 21. [g] 1 John ii. 10, 11. [h] Jer. vi. 16.
[i] Ps. xxiii. 1, 2. Jer. xxxi. 9. [k] Isai. xxvi. 3. 1 Sam. ii. 9.

## CCCCXXX.

### SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD.

Ps. cxxi. 1—8. *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.*

A LIFE of faith is generally acknowledged to be that which becomes the Christian: but how much is implied in a life of faith is very little considered. The Divine government is too often supposed to extend to great things only: and the idea of referring to God all the little occurrences of every day, is thought by many to be derogatory to his supreme Majesty. But God is to be seen as much in the fall of a sparrow, as in the fall of the greatest empire: and our dependence upon him should extend to every thing without exception. Should we attempt to draw a line between the events to which his attention may be supposed to be directed, and those which may be left, as the expression is, to chance, we should find ourselves utterly at a loss, and, in fact, should soon prove ourselves to be downright Atheists. The Scriptures admit of no such distinction: they ascribe every thing to God: even the events which in some respect owe their origin to Satan, in other points of view are traced up to God himself as their author*: and one very important use of the Psalms is, to shew us, how much the habit of referring every thing to God characterizes, composes, and elevates the Christian mind.

In the psalm before us we see this truth exemplified in the experience of David: in illustrating which, we shall notice,

1. The

* 1 Chron. xxi. 1. with 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

I. The resolution he formed—

The first verse of the psalm is somewhat differently rendered in the margin of our Bibles: "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Whence should my help come?" This, whilst it affixes an important sense to the passage, gives it peculiar force and beauty. It represents the Psalmist as expressing his conviction of the utter insufficiency of all earthly powers to assist him, and his determination to confide in God alone. And in this view the passage exactly accords with that declaration of the Church in the prophet Jeremiah, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel[b]."

But as it stands in our translation, it is a resolution of David to look unto Jehovah, who dwelleth on Mount Zion, or rather in the highest heavens, and to trust in him as the one only source of all good. Now this was,

1. A *wise* resolution—

[When our Lord said to his Disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Peter replied in the name of all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." In like manner we must ask, To whom can we go for help, except to the Lord our God? No creature can afford us any effectual aid. The creation itself subsists only through the continued agency of Him who first called it into existence, and in all its parts needs the same superintending care that we ourselves do. Whithersoever we turn our eyes for help, every creature uniformly replies, "It is not in me; neither in me." To look therefore to Jehovah, is our truest, our only, wisdom.]

2. A *pious* resolution—

[A man duly sensible of his dependence on God, abhors the idea of trusting in an arm of flesh. He would not so dishonour God; he would not so invade his unalienable prerogative. He loves the very thought of being a pensioner on the Divine bounty. The habit of committing every concern to God, and of receiving every blessing from God, is truly delightful to him. Hence he says with the Church of old, "Ashur shall not save us; neither will we ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work

[b] Jer. iii. 23.

work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy[c]." This is the dictate of true piety: and, whilst it ensures to men a constant communication of all necessary good, it renders every blessing ten-fold more sweet, as coming to them through the special intervention of their heavenly Father.]

3. A *necessary* resolution—

[This state of mind is equally necessary for every Child of man. The greatest monarch is as dependent upon God as the lowest person in the universe. No man has any power to secure himself for one single moment: "he is crushed before the moth," if God give it a commission to destroy him. Pharaoh himself was as open to the assault of all the different plagues, and as incapable of removing any one of them, as any of his subjects were. What peace then can any man enjoy, who has no other than a created arm to rest upon? If we would have any solid comfort in our minds, we must realize a sense of God's superintending care, and rest in him for a supply of every blessing that we stand in need of.]

Having declared his resolution, the Psalmist informs us of,

II. The encouragement given him to persevere in it—

It is worthy of observation, that, after the two first verses of the psalm, David ceases to speak, and is himself addressed by another, who overheard his resolution. And who is it that thus replies to him? It is no other than God himself; who immediately replies, in order to shew to the whole universe how pleasing and acceptable to him such a resolution is. Nor are such transitions unusual in the Scriptures: but they deserve especial notice, wherever they occur. We may see a precisely similar passage in the book of the prophet Jeremiah; where the Lord, having overheard the confessions of his repenting people, instantly takes up the subject, and for their encouragement addresses them in these gracious terms; "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me; and I will put thine abominations out of my sight; and thou shalt not remove[d]." The declarations which God here made to David, are equally applicable to all, who, like him, are resolved to

[c] Hos. xiv. 3. [d] Jer. iii. 25. & iv. 1.

to live in a state of dependence upon God. Let us consider them,

1. In relation to temporal things—

[All the different expressions which are here used, have an evident reference to what was wrought for Israel during the forty years of their sojourning in the wilderness. The roughness of their untrodden path would often occasion "their feet to slip:" the heat of the sun by day, and the influence of the moon, together with the noxious damps, by night, would greatly molest them in their journey: and their danger from savage beasts or venomous reptiles would tend to keep them in continual alarm. But God promises that no evil shall hurt those who trust in him.

He will be to them an *ever-watchful* helper. Men, be they ever so numerous, may be off their guard: but the Keeper of Israel never will: he never slumbereth nor sleepeth: no enemy can escape his notice; no device be hidden from his view: and his express engagement to his people is, that "no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper[e]."

He will be to them also an *ever-present* helper. The idea of his being "our shade upon our right hand" is exceeding beautiful: for none but those in hot climates can fully conceive the benefit of a shade to protect them from the intense heat of the sun, which not unfrequently strikes persons dead upon the spot. But the expression of being our shade upon our *right* hand probably alludes to the situation of the cloud which attended the Israelites through the wilderness, not only to guide them in their journey, but to shade them by day, and to give them light and warmth also by night. And, as the journey of the Israelites was chiefly in a north-east direction, the cloud which afforded them this shade would be on their *right* hand during the whole of the day. But not to lay any stress on this, the import of the expression obviously is, that, wherever we are open to the assaults of an enemy, God will be ever present to afford us his protection; and that whether we be going out or coming in, we may be assured of his continued and effectual care.

He will yet further be an *all-sufficient* helper. Neither sun nor moon, (which may represent the greatest of created powers,) nor indeed any other Being, shall hurt us; for "He will preserve us from *all* evil," and *that*, not for a season only, but "from this time forth, and even for evermore." To the same effect this truth is largely declared in the book of Job, in reference to every species of calamity, that it shall not befall any one who trusts in God, or, if it befall him, it shall be overruled for his more abundant good[f]. We must doubtless take the promise in this latitude; else it would be contrary to fact and experience: but understood with this limitation, it is, and ever shall be, accomplished in every Child of God[g].]

2. In

[e] Isai. liv. 17. [f] Job v. 19—23. [g] Isai. xxvii. 3.

2. In relation to the concerns of the soul—

[It is expressly asserted here, that God will "preserve our *souls*." We may be assured therefore, that whatever he does for the body that perishes, shall much more be done for our immortal part. Yes, "he will keep the feet of his saints," nor shall all the powers, whether of earth or hell, be able to cast them down. "Never will he leave us; never, never forsake us." Our enemies, it is true, will fight against us to the uttermost: but he will suffer none of them ever to "pluck us out of his hand." To this extent St. Paul avows his confidence in God[h]: and every Believer may justly assure himself, that "nothing in heaven, earth, or hell, shall ever separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have no fears—

[Whence proceeds this? If from confidence in the power and veracity of God, it is well: you are then entitled to cast off all fear; for they who fear him, have nothing else to fear. But if your want of fear arises, as it too generally does, from an ignorance of your danger, or a confidence in yourselves, you have no reason for self-congratulation: since the greater your fancied security is, the more imminent and awful is your danger. Would you be afraid if you were surrounded by armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you? and will you not be afraid, when Satan himself, that roaring lion, is going about day and night seeking the everlasting destruction of your souls? To continue ignorant of your danger is the readiest way to insure your everlasting ruin. What if some alarm be occasioned by a sight of your danger? Is it not better to dread the pursuer of blood, than to fall into his hands? Will not your security when you have gained the city of refuge, compensate for the terror that drove you thither? Know then, that if you are yet strangers to a salutary fear, you have yet to learn the true import of a Scriptural and saving hope.]

2. To those who are too much under the influence of fear—

[You should never forget what an Almighty Friend you have. How many times in this psalm are you reminded, that the LORD, even the Almighty God, is your helper and deliverer! Were he less powerful, or less vigilant, or less worthy of credit, you might well fear. But what ground can *he* have for fear, who has God himself for his refuge? O! learn to say with David, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" I ask not from whence your dangers or your fears arise: for, if they were a thousand times greater and better founded

[h] Rom. viii. 35—39. with 2 Tim. ii. 18.

founded than they are, this one answer were sufficient to remove them all, "If God be for you, who can be against you?" Only rely on God, and you are safe. See how tenderly he chides your unbelieving fears[i]. If under any circumstances you are tempted to indulge an unbelieving fear, check yourselves instantly, as David did; and say with him, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God[k]."]

[i] Isai. xl. 27—31. [k] Ps. xlii. ult.

## CCCCXXXI.

### GOD TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN OUR MERCIES.

Ps. cxxiv. 1—8. *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

ON what occasion this psalm was written, we are not informed: but in the title it is ascribed to David: and in his history, no period suits it better than the time of Absalom's rebellion, when, but for God's interposition, in defeating the counsel of Ahitophel, the banished monarch and his adherents must all have perished.

But as there is no period fixed, it will be needless to enter into a consideration of any circumstances as connected with the psalm, since all that we should say could rest on no better foundation than conjecture. Of course, if we apply the psalm to the circumstances of our own nation at the present time, we shall not be understood as intimating that there was any such reference intended by the Psalmist, but merely as accommodating the general expressions of it to our own particular case: and truly we must say, that if they had originally been penned

for

for the occasion, they could not be more suited to it than they are.

Two things then we would lead you to consider:

I. The great deliverances which we are now met to celebrate—

During this long and bloody war, several occasions have arisen wherein we have experienced the most signal deliverance. We will call your attention to a few; we have been saved, almost by miracle, from,

1. The revolutionary principles—

[In our own nation, as well as on the continent, there was a general outcry about liberty and equality; and multitudes in every rank of life united their efforts to overthrow the Constitution of this country, and to establish a democracy in the land. Even pious people in vast numbers were carried away by the delusive idea of ameliorating the condition of the lower classes of society, and lent their aid to others who aimed at nothing less than the utter subversion of the Government. But through the energy of our king, and of those who administered his government, God in his infinite mercy preserved us: and we have lived to see the day when almost all who were so deluded have seen their error, and been led to regard the Constitution of this country as the most perfect of any upon earth.]

2. The mutiny of the fleet—

[Time was, when the dissatisfaction so industriously cherished and diffused by traitors within our own bosom, and spread, by means of corresponding committees, over the whole land, had reached even that class of men who in all former ages had been the boast and glory of their country, the sailors in our fleet. Many of these broke forth into open mutiny, and threatened to carry our ships, which were the bulwark of the nation, to the ports of our enemies. Such a blow as that would have destroyed us utterly: but the same kind Providence which had watched over us on so many other occasions, interposed to rescue us from the impending calamity, and to restore amongst our fleet that union and energy which have rendered it triumphant in every quarter of the globe.]

3. The threatened invasion—

[What immense preparations were made by our enemies to invade us, and what little preparation there was on our part to oppose them, cannot have escaped from our remembrance. True it is, that we were powerful by sea; and that consideration it was which kept the enemy in check: but had not their forces been

been called off to other encounters, there can be no donbt but that they would have attempted to invade us; and, if they had succeeded in landing only two thirds of the forces which they might have brought against us, there can be no doubt but that they would have seized and plundered the metropolis, and spread desolation and misery over the whole country. We all know what destruction they threatened us with[a]; and, could they have once overrun our country, they would have reduced us to such a state of subjection as Israel experienced, when the Philistines suffered them not even to retain a workman in their land, who should be able to fabricate arms for their defence. Not a dock, or a naval architect, would have been left in our land.

4. The overthrow of the Russian empire—

[Already had the whole of Europe been combined against us, and we were constrained to array ourselves against their united force. But the insatiable ambition of our great enemy raised up opposition at last from amongst his own allies, and gave us an opportunity of engaging him in a foreign land, instead of having to contend with him on our own soil. Still however we must have fallen before him, had not his insupportable despotism goaded to resistance the Russian monarch. But at one time, even that event also appeared to have prepared for us a more complete destruction. But God suffered the proud Oppressor madly to protract his stay amongst the ruins of Moscow, till a retreat became extremely difficult. Hence arose defeat: the severity of the climate, and the extraordinary energy of the Russian armies, soon dissipated the forces of our enemy; and enabled many who had been compelled to fight under his banners, to turn their arms against him, and to seek the recovery of their former independence. Yet, after all, if the last great battle had not been decided in favour of the allied armies, our enemy might still have retrieved his former losses, and forged chains for the whole civilized world. But the time was come for God to have mercy on us; and he has had mercy beyond all that could possibly have been expected: he has trodden down the Oppressor, as the mire in the streets; and has restored peace amongst all the contending nations, even such a peace as the world never saw before; a peace cemented by universal harmony and love.]

Let us then, instead of contemplating our mercies only, proceed to consider,

II. The duty of acknowledging God in them—

In the psalm before us, all the success is ascribed to God alone: God's gracious agency is acknowledged to have been the sole cause of Israel's preservation[b]; for

[a] "Delenda est Carthago!" was their universal cry.

[b] ver. 1, 2.

for this his name is humbly and gratefully adored[c]; and he is declared to be henceforth the only hope of his people[d]. In like manner should we acknowledge him in all the mercies which we now celebrate: for,

1. They do all in reality proceed from him—

[We are by no means disposed to withhold our tribute of praise from those who have been the instruments of our deliverance. Those who have been at the helm of our affairs have certainly laid their plans with consummate wisdom; and our forces both by sea and land have carried them into execution with extraordinary energy. But still, without the Divine blessing their united efforts, however great, would have failed. It is God alone who inspired them either with wisdom or courage; and he alone who gave success to their endeavours. We are assured that even the ploughman and the thresher derive all their skill from him[e]; how much more then the governors of nations, and the conductors of fleets and armies! The victories of Cyrus were, as much as any could be, the result of human energy; because God was not known either to him or to his people: but God tells us, that HE, even HE alone, gave him success[f]. In like manner it is HE, and HE alone, who has conducted us in safety through all our troubles, and brought them at last to such a happy issue. That we should see and acknowledge this, is of infinite importance; because God is "a jealous God, who will not give his glory to another," or endure that we should "sacrifice to our own drag, and burn incense to our own net." Hear with what earnestness he cautioned the Jews against this great impiety[g]; and let us learn with all possible care to avoid it: let us bear in mind that it is God alone "who maketh wars to cease, and breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariot in the fire[h];" and that, as there is not evil, so neither is there good, in the city, which is not the work of his hands[i].]

2. The acknowledging of him in them gives us the truest enjoyment of them—

[Others may indulge in carnal mirth; but their joy will expire "as the crackling of thorns under a pot;" and no solid benefit will accrue to their souls. But if we view God in our mercies, they will lead our affections heavenwards; they will tend to abase us in the dust for our own unworthiness, and to magnify in our estimation the goodness of God, who has done such great things for us. Compare these feelings with those which the ungodly experience on such occasions; how pure, how elevating,

[e] ver. 6. [d] ver. 8.
[c] Isai. xxviii. 26—29. [f] Isai. xlv. 1—7. [g] Deut. viii. 11—17.
[h] Ps. xlvi. 9, 10. [i] Amos iii. 6.

vating, how abiding! We may see the conduct of the ungodly strikingly exemplified by the Amalekites after they had invaded and plundered Ziklag: "they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating, and drinking, and dancing, because of the great spoil that they had taken[k]." On the other hand, we may behold in Israel the conduct of the godly, singing praises unto God, and glorifying him for all the wonders he had wrought for them at the Red Sea; "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[l]?" Can we doubt which of the two had the richer enjoyment of their prosperity? Let us then imitate the pious Israelites: yea, let us contemplate, like David, every occurrence whereby God has manifested his care over us; and let us, in reference to every one of them, say, "His mercy endureth for ever; his mercy endureth for ever[m]."]

3. A view of him in these his providential mercies will encourage us to apply to him for the blessings of his grace—

[Great as the dangers were from which Israel had been delivered by the interpositions of their God, they were not a whit greater than those to which we are exposed every day and hour. Truly we have a sea of difficulties ready to overwhelm us: we have a roaring lion seeking to devour us; and a subtle enemy ready to take us in his snares. And who, but God, can deliver us? Who can hope to escape from so great perils, if God himself be not on his side? Truly, "our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth," and in his name alone. Where is there one of us, who, when he considers the number and power of his spiritual enemies, has not reason to say, "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth?" Sure we are, that there is not a Believer amongst us, who does not view himself as "a brand plucked out of the burning," and marvel at the grace that has been magnified towards him in the redemption of his soul.

Now then let those who have not yet experienced this mercy, consider how gracious God has been to our guilty land, and what an amazing deliverance he has vouchsafed to us: and let them say with themselves, "Will God be less gracious to my soul?" Has he not assured me, that "he willeth not the death of any sinner;" that "he will cast out none who come to him in the name of Jesus;" and that, if I make my requests known to him, he will fill me with "a peace that passeth all understanding?" O let us put this matter to a trial; let us see whether or not he is "rich in mercy unto all that call upon him." Beloved Brethren, the

[k] 1 Sam. xxx. 16. [l] See Exod. xv. 1—11.

[m] See Ps. cxxxvi. where this is repeated twenty-six times in as many verses.

the time is short: there are yet but a few more months or years, perhaps but a few more days or hours, before the day of salvation will be closed. We would earnestly wish, that, at the moment of your departure hence, you should be able to look back on all the dangers you have escaped, and with triumphant exultation adopt the language of the psalm before us. Certainly, as many of us as shall be saved at last, will instantly, on their entrance into the eternal world, begin the song of the Redeemed, and sing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever." Now then seek to have the Lord on your side: beg him to strengthen you against all the evils of your own hearts; to rescue you from the impending storms of a tumultuous world; and to deliver you from all the deceit and violence of your great Adversary. So shall you have peace with God in your own conscience; and in due season enter into that rest, where neither sin nor sorrow shall ever assault you more.]

*** The author was not aware that he had written on this subject before. But as the former Skeleton consists of only a single page, and this goes over such different ground, particularly in shewing how to improve national mercies, he has thought it not improper to print this also.

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## CCCCXXXII.

### DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL BONDAGE ACKNOWLEDGED.

Ps. cxxvi. 1—4. *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.*

The great body of the Psalms was composed by David: but some were written many hundred years before his time, as the 90th was by Moses; and others many hundred years after him, as that before us, which was evidently written after the Babylonish Captivity. It relates in the first instance to the delivery of Israel from their sore bondage, and their restoration to their long desolated country: but it is well applicable to that redemption which is vouchsafed to the souls of men, and which was shadowed forth by that great event.

Let

Let us consider from the passage,

I. The deliverance here celebrated—

Grievous beyond expression was Israel's captivity. They were treated with the utmost cruelty by their Babylonish oppressors[a]: and their sufferings were greatly heightened by the derision with which their pious lamentations were regarded[b]. But in proportion to the greatness of their afflictions was their joy at the unexpected deliverance vouchsafed to them. Observe,

1. The feelings excited by it—

[Among *the captives themselves* the joy was so great, that they scarcely knew whether it were a reality or a dream. They were like Peter, when delivered from prison by an angel on the very night previous to his intended execution: "He went out and followed the angel; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision[c]." All their lamentations were instantly turned to joy: "their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing." The sight of such an unprecedented event filled all *the surrounding nations* with astonishment, and constrained them to acknowledge that it was the work, not of man, but of God: "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." The Israelites themselves readily concurred in this sentiment; and, on hearing the congratulations offered them, thankfully replied, "The LORD hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."]

2. The supplications it drew forth—

[Though permission was given them to return to their own land, and every thing was provided for their sustenance by the way, and their assistance at the end of their journey, the Jews saw that there was a great and discouraging work before them: but, as nothing was impossible to Jehovah, they intreated him to perfect what he had begun, and "to turn again their captivity as the streams in the south." In the southern or hilly country of Judea there were, as in all mountainous countries, frequent and sudden inundations; which however as rapidly subsided, soon after the rains had ceased; so that, where but a few hours before the country bore the aspect of universal desolation, it speedily assumed the most lovely and flourishing appearance, the valleys smiling on every side with renovated and augmented verdure. Thus the Jews desired, that the ravages made in their now desolated country might be soon repaired, and that, through the influence of their almighty Guardian, their efforts might be crowned with speedy and complete success.]

We

[a] Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9. [b] ib. ver. 3, 4. [c] Acts xii. 9.

We forbear to dwell upon the event itself, that we may enter somewhat minutely into,

II. The more glorious deliverance that was typified by it—

The event before us is undoubtedly to be regarded as shadowing forth that infinitely greater deliverance which is wrought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ[d]. And the correspondence between the two is particularly striking. Observe,

1. The deliverance itself—

[Grievous as was the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, it was nothing in comparison of that sorer bondage to which we are subjected by the power of sin and the wiles of Satan. All indeed have not the same work assigned them; but all are walking after the imagination of their own hearts, "being taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will."

The promised Deliverer however has arrived; has entered into the conflict with our great Adversary, and utterly subdued him. Jesus, foretold by name hundreds of years before his advent in the flesh, has accomplished the work for which he was raised up; and, having now "ascended up on high and led captivity captive," he has sent his Heralds to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." This is the very first use he makes of his newly-acquired power. Nor is it an empty proclamation, without any facilities afforded for carrying his gracious purposes into effect: he gives us back for the use and honour of Jehovah all those vessels of which we had been despoiled, and which, though originally formed for the service of God alone, have, through the influence of our great Adversary, been prostituted and debased to the vilest uses: yes, all our faculties and powers are now restored by him to their proper office; and the all-sufficient aid of his Spirit is promised to us throughout all our dreary pilgrimage. Our almighty Deliverer has gone further still, and issued his commands to all throughout his vast empire, to succour us in our work, and to impart to us whatsoever we may stand in need of[e]: the very angels in heaven are enjoined to attend us in all our way, to encamp round about us, to hold us up lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone, and to minister to us in all that our necessities may require.

All this too is offered to us as a free act of mercy on the part of our great Deliverer. It was one of the most extraordinary

[d] Compare Isai. xl. 3—5. with Luke iii. 3—6. or Isai. lii. 7. with Rom. x. 15.

[e] Ezra i. 1—11.

dinary parts of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon, that Cyrus should liberate them without any remuneration: but how does it exalt beyond all estimate the value of our redemption, that it is offered to us freely, "without money and without price!"]

2. The effects produced by it—

[When first a soul that has been sinking under a load of sin and guilt is made to hear the tidings of a free and full deliverance, they seem to him "as an idle tale:" he can scarcely believe it possible that such mercy should be vouchsafed to *him*, and that one who has been all his days a willing captive should be delivered: and, when the joys of this salvation burst upon his soul, he appears to himself to be, as it were, in a dream; so far does the deliverance exceed all that he could previously have conceived. Then his mouth, which was but lately filled with lamentations and complaints, is "filled with laughter, and his tongue with singing[f]"——— Nor is the surprise confined to him alone: his friends and neighbours behold with astonishment the change that has taken place in him: they now see the whole course of his life changed: they behold the chains with which he was tied and bound, now loosed; the sins that once had dominion over him, now mortified; and the griefs, which they interpreted as symptoms or forerunners of derangement, now turned to joy, and "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." So great is the change in *their* eyes, that though they love it not, they are constrained to admire it, and to acknowledge the hand of God in it; "The Lord hath done great things for them:" and, though they may deride it in public, they envy in their hearts the lot which they affect to despise. As for those who experience the happy change, they thankfully adore their heavenly Benefactor; "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!"——— They take their harps that have been so long suspended on the willows, and sing with inexpressible delight the songs of Zion.

But the more they have experienced, the more they desire to possess all the fulness of the blessings prepared for them. Gladly would they, if it were possible, have all the remains of sin purged out from their hearts, and all conflicts with it for ever terminated. They pant for the full attainment of the Divine image; and cry with fervour to their God, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!" Still however, not discouraged by the length of their journey, or the difficulties to be surmounted, or the toils which they must undergo, before they shall attain the full object of their desires, they set out in humble dependence on their God, assured of final and complete success. They are willing to "sow in tears, confident that in due time they shall reap in joy."]

ADDRESS;

[f] Isai. xxxv. 10.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who have experienced some measure of this deliverance—

[You have heard the parallel drawn between the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, and that of which you are the happy subjects. It remains for you to carry it yet further, and to realize it in its utmost extent. Of all the multitudes who set out on their journey towards Zion, there was not one who was not sensible of the cruel bondage from which he had been delivered; not one who did not feel his obligations to Cyrus as his great deliverer; not one, who did not see that his provision by the way, and his succours at the close of his journey, were the fruits of that same grace that first proclaimed the deliverance: moreover, all of them without exception would feel a consciousness that they were not yet arrived at the place which their souls longed after; but that they were daily proceeding towards it: they felt no inclination to rest satisfied with any thing they met with in the wilderness; but looked forward to the enjoyment of God's ordinances in Jerusalem as the consummation of their bliss. Now then let it be so with you. Never for a moment lose the remembrance of your former captivity, or of your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, who "by his own death has destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and hath delivered those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage." Never for a moment forget that you are on a journey towards Zion, and that all your fresh springs are in that adorable Saviour, who has redeemed you by his blood. Never for a moment cease to press forward in your heavenly way; but, forgetting what is behind, reach forward, like coursers, to the destined goal. Let all your hopes, and all your happiness, be in heaven. In a word, *be exactly in the state and habit of your minds, what the liberated captives were in their journey towards Zion.* Then will you have attained the perfection of Christian pilgrims, and will in due time possess in all its fulness your destined inheritance.]

2. To those who are yet the bond-slaves of sin and Satan—

[This is the state of every man by nature. It is to little purpose to say, that we are not addicted to any gross iniquity; for "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or, "in the wicked one:" and if the Captain of our Salvation have not rescued us from the hands of "the strong man armed," our very peace is a sufficient evidence of our bondage. If you are yet strangers to the experience above described, you are yet in bondage to the great enemy of Zion ———

But we are authorized to declare that this adversary is cast down;

down; that our Cyrus has prevailed over him; and that liberty is now given to every captive in Babylon to return to Zion. Behold, as an Herald of our adorable Saviour, I now announce to you these glad tidings. Oh! be ye not like too many of that ill-fated nation, who preferred their ease to toils, their bondage to liberty, their dwellings in Babylon to their inheritance in Jerusalem.

Put yourselves under the guidance of the true Zerubbabel, before whom "the mountains shall become a plain." If you meet with difficulties, know that he has issued his proclamation to all his creatures, to afford you all necessary aid; and if, instead of aiding, they endeavour to obstruct you, he has engaged that all things shall work together for your good. Come out then from Babylon, every one of you; and let this be the one harmonious proposal of you all, "Come, let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God." Fear not but that the object, when attained, will richly recompense all the difficulties of your way. Even in this world your "joys shall be unspeakable and glorified:" but who can conceive the joy that awaits you in the Zion above? How will your mouth *then* be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing! How will you then, in concert with all the heavenly hosts, exclaim, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!" Be content then to "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, knowing assuredly that at last you shall come again with rejoicing, bearing your sheaves with you."]

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## CCCCXXXIII.

### THE BENEFIT OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

Ps. cxxxiii. 1—3. *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

IN this psalm we have a commendation of Christian love and unity. It seems to have been written some time after David's entire possession of the whole kingdom; when the tribes being all united under one head, the horrors of civil war were exchanged for the blessings of peace; and all who were brethren according to the flesh, enjoyed the fullest exercise of brotherly love, in union with each

each other, and in communion with their God. He seems to have been contemplating the blessed change, till his soul, filled with holy joy and gratitude, exclaimed, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity!" He then pursues the same idea, illustrating both the goodness and pleasantness of it, each by an appropriate similitude: its pleasantness resembling the fragrance of the ointment poured on Aaron's head; and its goodness being justly compared to dews of Hermon or of Zion, by which a continued verdure and fertility are preserved, where without them vegetation would quickly fail. We shall follow the line he has traced out for us, and point out *the excellence of Christian unity*,

I. As conducing to our present comfort—

There is no pleasure so refined, so exquisite, as that which results from the exercise of Christian love. It always cheers the bosom in which it dwells, and imparts the sublimest joy to those who meet it with corresponding emotions. It is beautifully compared with the ointment which was poured on Aaron's head at his consecration to the priestly office.

Let us briefly examine the similitude—

[A full account of this ointment is given us in the Book of Exodus[a]. The ingredients of which it was composed were of the most odoriferous kind: the proportions of each were minutely specified by God himself: and its use, when properly compounded, was solely confined to the things or persons connected with the service of the sanctuary. It was strictly forbidden to the whole nation to form any other ointment like unto it, or to use any part of it for any other purpose than that which was ordained by God. It was itself most holy; and it made every thing holy that came in contact with it. At the consecration of Aaron, it was poured upon his head in rich profusion, so that it ran down upon his beard, even to *the collar* of his garment[b]; and it diffused on every side a fragrance that was inexpressibly sweet and refreshing.]

Let us now consider the application of it—

[With this is Christian love to be compared. Now love is altogether

[a] Exod. xxx. 22—33. [b] See the marginal version.

altogether of Divine original: every ingredient of it is formed by the hand of God himself, and the whole compounded by him in its due proportions: and every one on whom it is poured is from thenceforth sanctified to the Lord. It is in its own nature so flowing, that, when poured upon the head, it will descend upon the whole man: and so fragrant is it, that not the person himself only, but all who come in contact with him, will be refreshed with its odours: and more especially when a whole Society or Church are partakers of this heavenly unction, such is the fragrance, as to resemble as nearly as possible the courts of heaven itself.

Say, ye who have ever received this heavenly gift, whether ye have not been brought, as it were, into a new world, and whether ye be not breathing from day to day a new atmosphere? Compare it with that which the world has framed in imitation of it, and which gives grace and ornament to the more polished circles of society: how poor, how vapid, how destitute of all refreshing odour, is that which is called politeness! the very persons who most cultivate it, are most sensible what an empty formality it is: it is a mere mimicry of what is good: and in all the diversified expressions of it there is a secret consciousness, that nothing real is designed; that it is a mere artificial ceremony, invented and practised in order to keep out of sight those hateful passions, which would destroy all the comfort of social intercourse. Its very forms are burthensome to those who most abound in them: and it is a relief to a man to put them off, and to return to the unconstrained familiarities of domestic life. We mean not to disparage that which undoubtedly contributes much to the maintenance of public order and decorum: but when compared with that love which grace inspires, it is a mere vanity; it is like a sun painted upon canvas, in comparison with the sun shining in the firmament of heaven. Who that lives under the influence of gracious affections, and moves in a circle where Christian love abounds, does not feel this? His spirits are not tumultuous indeed; but they are sweetly elevated towards high and heavenly things: he carries with him a divine savour, wherever he moves: when he enters into the society of the saints, or into the tabernacle of his God, the fragrance is drawn forth and greatly increased, so that "the whole house, as it were, is filled with the odour of the ointment." Oh, Beloved, how pleasant is it for Brethren to dwell together in unity! As none could form a just conception of the odours of Aaron's ointment, but those who came within the sphere of its influence, so none can form any adequate idea of the sweetness of love, but those on whom the Spirit of God has imparted this divine unction. We may however see that this representation is just, even though we should not be able fully to comprehend it: for

St. Paul urging with all possible importunity the exercise of love, recommends it from the consideration of the comfort imparted by it: "If there be any *comfort of love*, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind[c]."]

But the Psalmist speaks of unity as being "good," as well as pleasant: and in his illustration of it in this view, he leads us to contemplate it,

II. As administering to our everlasting welfare—

The effect of dew in hot countries is exceedingly beneficial—

[In this country, where rains are frequent, we have comparatively little dew: but in hot countries, where the rains are periodical, the dew, as in Paradise, almost supplies the place of rain[d]. On Hermon, and on Zion, it came down in rich abundance. In its descent it was gentle; but in its operation powerfully influential, reviving and invigorating every plant, and fertilizing the earth on every side.]

And such also is the influence of love on the souls of men—

[On Zion, "God commanded his blessing" in the days of old; and on our Zion also he still commands it, "even life for evermore." But what is the principle whereby he operates this glorious change? It is love, or "faith working by love:" "Love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God: he that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love." "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, *dwelleth in God, and God in him.*" "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, *and his love is perfected in us*[e]." It is by the exercise of this divine principle that "we know we have passed from death unto life;" and "by it are we recognized by all men as Christ's disciples[f]." The proper operations of this principle are distinctly and fully marked in the First Epistle to the Corinthians[g]; and they are most beautifully exemplified in the conduct of the primitive Christians[h]. Such will every Church be, where love reigns: the graces of the whole collective body will flourish with ever increasing beauty and fruitfulness[i]: and *that* will be verified which God promised previously to every Sabbatic year, "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years[k]."

Say then Whether Christian love and unity be not "*good?*"

Say

[c] Phil. ii. 1, 2. [d] Gen. ii. 4, 5. [e] 1 John iv. 7, 8, 12, 16.
[f] 1 John iii. 14. & John xiii. 35. [g] 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.
[h] Acts iv. 32. [i] Hos. xiv. 4—7. [k] Lev. xxv. 21.

Say whether any thing in the universe can tend so much to the perfection of our nature as this; or whether there be any thing that will so advance us in a meetness for our heavenly inheritance?———]

APPLICATION—

[Cultivate then this heavenly principle. If you seek only *your own personal happiness*, there is nothing that will contribute to it like this———Nor will any thing so advance the welfare of the Church. Christians are one body in Christ: and when every member and every joint supplies its proper portion of this divine unction, "the whole body will grow unto the edifying of itself in love," and will in due time "attain the full measure of the stature of Christ[l]"———And need I say, how *God will be glorified*, when his enemies are constrained to exclaim, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Guard then against every disposition contrary to love——— And "if there be any among you who would cause divisions and offences, avoid them"———In mutual forbearance and forgiveness, follow the example of Christ himself[m]———Thus shall you be fitted for those realms of love and joy, where all the countless multitudes of the Redeemed unite in one harmonious song of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.]

[l] Eph. iv. 13, 15, 16. [m] Eph. iv. 31, 32. & v. 1, 2.

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## CCCCXXXIV.

### A CALL TO ADORE GOD FOR HIS MERCY.

Ps. cxxxvi. 26. *O give thanks unto the God of heaven; for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PRAISE is the employment of heaven: and praise should be the employment of earth also. "Rejoice evermore," is a special command of God: and to express our joy in praises and thanksgivings is equally commanded: "In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." The calls which are given us in the Psalms to the performance of this duty are very numerous: but in none more urgent than in the psalm before us. The particular object here proposed as the subject of our thanksgivings, is the Mercy of God, which we are here called upon to *contemplate* and *adore*.

Let us then, in compliance with the Psalmist's exhortation, endeavour,

I. To contemplate it—

Two things in particular respecting it we would propose to your consideration:

1. Its unbounded extent—

[The Psalmist, after speaking of mercy as constituting one of the most glorious perfections of the Deity[a], notices the manifestations of it which we behold in all the wonders of Creation[b], and Providence[c], and Redemption[d]. Whilst we acknowledge the hand of God in these things, we are but too apt to overlook *his mercy* as displayed in them. But on *this* we should principally fix our attention, as being most calculated to inflame our love and gratitude towards our heavenly Benefactor. Contemplate then the benefits which you receive from the sun, and moon, and stars, and from the infinitely diversified productions of this *terraqueous* globe———Then behold all the interpositions of God in behalf of his people Israel, and see in them what he is yet daily performing both for the bodies and souls of all who trust in him———Then, in the temporal redemptions vouchsafed to Israel under their most desperate and degraded states, behold the redemption of our souls from sin and Satan, death and hell, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ ———Here are subjects of contemplation which might well occupy the mind of the highest Archangel, and which therefore deserve *our* most serious attention.

But we would more particularly recommend to every one to consider the mercies which he himself has received: we would have every one trace them from his earliest infancy to the present moment: and, in reference to those interpositions of the Deity which appear to have been more conspicuous, we would recommend that they be inspected with peculiar care, *entering minutely into all the particulars of each,* and *viewing in each distinct particular the transcendent mercy of God.* Let *the psalm before us* be particularly noticed in this view as *a pattern*[e]. When we take only a superficial view of things *in the general,* we remain unaffected by them: it is by entering into them *in the detail,* and dwelling on the minutest particulars, that we get our hearts properly affected with them. This therefore we would most earnestly recommend to all who would obtain a due sense of the mercies conferred upon them.

But we must not imagine that the dispensations which have been pleasing to flesh and blood have been our only mercies; for amongst our severest trials will be found, for the most part, our richest

[a] ver. 1. [b] ver. 5—9. [c] ver. 10—22. [d] ver. 23, 24.
[e] ver. 9—22.

richest mercies. The successive trials of Joseph were of the most painful nature: yet they were all mercies in disguise. If we descend to more trifling incidents, such as Balaam's ass proving restive, and crushing his foot against a wall, and afterwards falling with him, they, as we know, were the very means by which his life was saved [f]. Thus the things which grieve and irritate us at the time may be the most merciful dispensations that we could possibly have received: and we ought to receive them as expressions of God's love [g], sent to promote our good in this world [h], and to work for us an augmented weight of glory in the world to come [i]. Even the darkness and temptations with which our souls may be oppressed, must also be numbered among the means which God in his infinite mercy makes use of for the humbling and quickening, the sanctifying and saving, of our souls [k]———]

2. Its everlasing duration—

[See how the mercy of God wrought in all the days of old, even from the foundation of the world! Precisely in the same manner it still operates, and shall ever continue to operate, towards all who fear his name [l]——God will not withdraw it from those who are united unto Christ by faith [m]——He may hide his face from them for a season; but with everlasting mercies will he gather them [n]——*The repetition of this truth twenty-six times in as many verses* is a very sufficient pledge to us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance [o]," and that "whom he loveth, he loveth to the end [p]."]

Having contemplated, though so imperfectly, the mercy of our God, we now call upon you,

II. To adore it—

A tribute of praise and thanksgiving for such mercy is the least that can be demanded of us. And well may it be demanded; for,

1. It is due from us—

[Can we conceive, that, after all the mercies vouchsafed unto us, no return is required? Are we to be as stupid and insensible as beasts? Is this a state that becomes persons who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son?———

Perhaps it will be said by some, I have not yet obtained an interest in Christ: how then can I render thanks for what I have

[f] Numb. xxxiii. 22—33. [g] Heb. xii. 6.
[h] Rom. viii. 28. [i] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.
[k] Isai. xxvii. 8, 9. & Hos. v. 15. & Ps. xxv. 10.
[l] Ps. ciii. 17. [m] Ps. lxxxix. 28—36.
[n] Isai. liv. 7—10. [o] Rom. xi. 29. [p] John xiii. 1.

have never received? To this we reply, Have you no *temporal* mercies for which to give thanks? and, if you are not yet partakers of *spiritual* mercies, have you no reason to thank God for the offer of them, and for not having been yet visited with the judgments which you have so richly merited? Think what is the state of millions who have not committed either more or greater sins than you; and what might at this moment have been your state also, if God in his infinite mercy had not spared you; and given you space for repentance? Do but think of this, and you will want no further incentive to gratitude and thanksgiving. But think also of the offers of salvation now made to you, a salvation free, and full, and everlasting: Oh! what thanks does this call for at your hands! What if one such offer were now made to those who are shut up under chains of everlasting darkness and despair; would no thanks be expressed by *them?* I call upon you then to give thanks unto the God of heaven, who yet waiteth to be gracious unto you, and "whose long-suffering you should account to be salvation."]

2. It is pleasing and acceptable to God—

[The acknowledgment so often repeated in the psalm before us has received more striking tokens of God's approbation than any other that was ever uttered by mortal man: David, knowing how acceptable it would be to God, appointed officers for the express purpose of repeating it in the service of the tabernacle[q]. And, when Solomon had brought the ark of God into the sanctuary that he had prepared for it, and the priests were singing the praises of God in the very words of our text, at that moment, I say, did God descend into the sanctuary, so that the priests could no longer stand to minister there by reason of the overwhelming presence of the divine glory[r]. Another and no less remarkable testimony of God's approbation was that which was given to Jehosaphat's use of these words at the time that he was going forth against three confederate armies: at the very instant that the priests began to utter this acknowledgment, God set the three confederate armies against each other, and stirred them up to kill one another; till they were utterly destroyed, without any conflict on the part of Israel[s]. What greater proof can we have of the delight which God feels in the exercise of mercy, and in commending it to the admiration of the whole universe? Begin then this song: continue this song throughout the day: let every fresh occurrence call forth fresh acknowledgments of the mercy of your God: and rest assured, that the more you abound in these expressions of your gratitude, the richer displays you shall have of the Divine glory, and the more entire victory over all your spiritual enemies.]

[q] 1 Chron. xvi. 41. [r] 2 Chron. v. 13. [s] 2 Chron. xx. 21—23.

## CCCCXXXV.

### THE OMNIPRESENCE AND OMNISCIENCE OF GOD.

Ps. cxxxix. 1—12. *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways: for there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me: Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

DAVID was a man bitterly persecuted and greatly calumniated. Nothing could exceed the acrimony with which Saul pursued him to take away his life. But David had the comfort of a good conscience: and he often appealed to the heart-searching God to attest his innocence of those crimes that were laid to his charge. It is probable that such were his circumstances when he composed this psalm; and that, when traduced by men, he consoled himself with the reflection, that every thought of his heart was fully known to God. The sentiments are delivered in an immediate address to the Deity himself: and they are such as ought to be deeply impressed on every mind.

Let us in our comment on this passage consider,

I. The truths here acknowledged—

David asserts in a most solemn manner the omnipresence of the Deity—

[Certain it is, that God is everywhere present. "If we should go up to heaven, he is there; or down to the grave or the abodes of departed spirits, he is there." There is no point of space where he is not, or where he is not as wholly and entirely present as in heaven itself. "The heaven cannot contain him." He himself puts the question to every Child of man;

man; "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord[a]." It is in vain therefore for us to think of hiding ourselves from him, since in every place "he besets us both behind and before, and so lays his hand upon us," that it is not possible for us to escape. He is present with us, "to lead us," if we seek his guidance; or "to hold us," if we would attempt to run from him.]

Together with the omnipresence of the Deity, the Psalmist further asserts also his omniscience—

[The eyes of God are continually upon the ways of the children of men. What men know only by searching, God knows by a single glance of his eye, and as perfectly, as if he had "searched" with the utmost care and diligence into its minutest parts and circumstances of every transaction. Even the thoughts, yea, and every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts, are open to him, together with the whole frame and habit of our minds. Are we retiring to rest, or lying upon our bed, or rising from thence after our night's repose? he knows precisely in what state we are. He sees whether we are calling our ways to remembrance, and humbling ourselves before him, and imploring mercy at his hands, together with grace that we may serve him more acceptably; or whether our minds be running out after earthly objects, and occupied about the things of time and sense. Do we go forth to our respective callings? he sees by what motives we are actuated, and by what principles we are governed. Whatever fraud we may practise in our dealings with men, or whatever artifice we may use to promote our own interests, he is privy to it: on the other hand, whatever dispositions we may exercise, or actions we may perform, for the glory of his name, he beholds that also. We may be so unostentatious, that even our right hand may not know what our left hand doeth: but he knoweth it, and marks it with his special favour. So likewise in the public assemblies of his people, he sees whether in our devotions we be humble, fervent, and believing; or whether we have a mere form of godliness, without the power of it. In a word, wherever we be, in public or in private, he knoweth infinitely more of us than the best instructed Christian in the universe can know of himself: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it." As for light or darkness, it makes no difference to him: "the night and the day to him are both alike." "All things" without exception, even the most hidden recesses of the heart, "are naked and open before him;" as the inmost parts of the sacrifices, when cut down the back-bone, were to the priest appointed to inspect them[b].]

These

[a] Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

[b] Heb. iv. 12, 13. τετραχηλισμένα. See also Jer. xvi. 17. & Job xxxiv. 22.

These are solemn truths: and the importance of them will forcibly appear, whilst we suggest,

II. Some reflections naturally arising from them—

On this subject we might multiply reflections without end, seeing that there is not any part of a Christian's experience which is not most intimately connected with it. But we will confine ourselves to two; namely,

1. That many, however high they may be in their own estimation, will be found most awfully to have deceived themselves in the last day—

[Among the foremost of these are *the ungodly and profane*. These, with an atheistical contempt of God, go on in their own way, saying, "Tush, God shall not see, neither shall the Almighty regard it:" "How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not[c]." But how will they be surprised in the day of judgment, to find, that not one single act, word, or thought of their whole lives had escaped the notice of the Deity! They, if no human eye beheld them, prosecuted their licentious pleasures without fear; little thinking Who was present, beholding their every act, hearing their every word, noting their every thought. Had but a child been present, they could not have proceeded with such indifference: but Jehovah's presence they regarded not, any more than if he had been, like the heathen gods, unknowing, unconscious, unconcerned. Truly, it is a fearful account which they will have to give, when they shall see the long catalogue of their crimes written with unerring accuracy, and brought forward against them as the ground of their eternal condemnation.

Next to these are *the proud formalists*, who, because they have never run to any excess of riot, applaud themselves as righteous and secure of the Divine favour. But whilst they boast of their negative righteousness and their performance of some external duties, and look with contempt upon those who have been less moral than themselves, little do they think in what a different light they are viewed by "God, who knoweth their hearts; in whose sight that which is highly esteemed amongst men is not unfrequently an utter abomination[d]." Very different is the standard by which he estimates them, from that by which they estimate themselves. The things for which he looks are, a tenderness of spirit, a lowliness of mind, a brokenness of heart, a deep self-loathing and self-abhorrence; not one atom of which has he ever seen in these self-applauding Pharisees. Say, thou formal Moralist, when did the heart-searching God ever see thee weeping for

[c] Job xxii. 13, 14. Ps. lxxiii. 11. [d] Luke xvi. 15.

for thy sins, and smiting on thy breast, like the repenting Publican, and fleeing to Christ as the manslayer to the city of Refuge? When did he ever hear thee adoring and magnifying him for the exceeding riches of his grace in Christ Jesus? Know that He can discern between true and false religion, whether thou canst or not; and that it is "not he who commendeth himself, that shall be approved in the judgment, but he whom the Lord commendeth."

But of all self-deceiving people, there are none who have so much reason to tremble at the idea of God's omniscience as *the false and hypocritical professor*. True, if there were ten thousand of this complexion present, not one would apply the title to himself, or suppose himself to be comprehended under this head. Yet are there many such in the Church of God; many, whose religion consists in hearing and talking about the Gospel, rather than in exercising the spirit it inculcates. If a zeal about certain tenets, or running to hear sermons, or putting themselves forward in religious meetings, or sitting in judgment upon others who are not of their party, if this were religion, they would be very eminent: but if religion consist in humility of mind, in meekness and lowliness of heart, in patience and forbearance towards those who differ from them, in a diligent attention to the duties of their place and station, and in a secret walk with God, they will be found most awfully wanting in them all. Alas! the religion of many makes them not a whit more amiable and lovely in their dispositions and habits, than if they had never heard of "the example of Christ:" on the contrary, their pride, and conceit, and forwardness, and presumption, render them ten-fold more disgusting both to God and man, than if they made no profession of religion at all. When such persons come into the presence of their God at the last day, what testimony will they receive from the heart-searching God, but this, that "they had a name to live, and were dead;" and that whilst "they said that they were Jews, they lied, and were in reality of the synagogue of Satan?" Yes; "their excellency may mount up to the heavens; but they shall perish like their own dung; and they that have seen them shall with surprise and grief exclaim, "Where are they[e]?"

The confidence which any of these classes may profess only binds upon them the more strongly the fetters they have forged for themselves, and insures more certainly their everlasting ruin[f].]

2. That many who are low in the estimation both of themselves and others, shall receive at last from God himself a glorious testimony in their behalf—

[Many there are of the Lord's "hidden ones," who have been

[e] Job xx. 4—7. [f] Prov. xxi. 2. & Ps. l. 21.

been kept back by diffidence or other circumstances from joining themselves to the Lord's people in an open and ostensible way, who yet shall receive from God the strongest tokens of his approbation. They perhaps envied the gifts and talents of some more forward professors, and thought themselves unworthy to join in their society: but God, who knew their hearts, said of them, "I know thy poverty; but thou art rich." He heard the sighs and groans which they uttered from day to day under a sense of their own unworthiness. He treasured up in his phial the tears they shed from a lothing of themselves, and an admiration of their God. He saw how precious the Lord Jesus Christ was to their souls, as their hope, their peace, their strength, their all. They were of no account perhaps amongst their fellow-Christians; but they were greatly beloved of their God. The more abased they were in their own eyes, the more exalted they were in his. He saw that in their prayers, their fastings, their alms, they sought not glory from men; and therefore "he in the last day will reward them openly." He will say of them in that day, "I saw thee under the fig-tree:" "if thy talent was small, thou madest a good improvement of it:" thou thoughtest that in "giving thy mite to the sanctuary," thou hadst done nothing; but I testify for thee, that "it was more in my sight than all that the rich gave out of their abundance." Yes, Beloved, as ye desire to serve and honour God, so will God accept and bless you: "He will bring to light the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man, who was of no account in his own eyes, have praise of God." If then, Brethren, ye be overlooked, or even calumniated and traduced by men, lay it not to heart, but seek to approve yourselves to the heart-searching God. Let man have his day, knowing assuredly that God will have his also[g], and that "his judgment will be according to truth."]

APPLICATION—

[Let all now shew what regard they have for God. Let all retire, with a consciousness that God sees them: let them go to their secret chamber, and there implore mercy from him for their past neglect of his presence, and grace that they may henceforth be enabled to "set him always before them," and to "walk in his fear all the day long."]

[g] 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. See the Greek.

## CCCCXXXVI.

### THE STRICT AWARD OF JUSTICE DEPRECATED.

Ps. cxliii. 2. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*

TRIALS and persecutions are sometimes permitted by God, for the purpose of honouring his people,

people, and advancing his work in their souls; and may justly be regarded by them as a *gift* from God, bestowed on them *for Christ's sake* for their eternal good[a]. But under some circumstances, trials may be viewed rather as judgments from God on account of some iniquity which they have committed. In this light must we consider all the troubles which arose to David in his own family, after his transgression in the matter of Uriah. The evil was unmerited as far as related to the persons who inflicted it; but it was received from God as a chastisement, under which it became him to humble himself in dust and ashes. We are not indeed certain at what time David wrote this psalm, whether when he was suffering under Saul, or when his own son Absalom had driven him from his throne. We are rather inclined to think it was at the latter period, because that affliction was so decidedly a punishment for his former sins, having been predicted by Nathan in that view. But, whatever were the circumstances under which the psalm was written, David viewed them as judgments from God which he deprecated; whilst, as to the immediate occasion, he appealed to God that he did not merit such treatment at the hands of man. In his appeal to God, he had called upon him "in faithfulness and in righteousness to hear and answer him;" but it was only in reference to the evils imputed to him by man that he dared thus to speak: before God he knew he deserved all that could be inflicted on him; and therefore he implored mercy at his hands, as one self-convicted and self-condemned: "Enter not, &c."

These words we shall consider in a two-fold point of view;

I. As containing principles for our instruction—

It is obvious that in this address of David to Jehovah the following truths are declared;

1. That all men are sinners before God—

[David speaks of "every living man." And this is the universal testimony of Scripture, that "there is none righteous, no, not one:" that "in many things we all offend;" that "every

[a] Phil. i. 29.

"every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The man who denies this, is said to be "a self-deceiver," and to "make God himself a liar[b]." Job, though not possessing the Mosaic writings, had a deep insight into this truth. He saw that it was the necessary consequence of the fall of Adam; for that our first parents being unclean, nothing but what was unclean could proceed from them[c]. Indeed it was by no ordinary method that Job was brought to the knowledge of this truth. A vision was vouchsafed to him for this express purpose, and such a vision as made "his very hairs to stand upright," and "every bone of his body to shake[d]." And verily a discovery of the corruption of our hearts would produce the same effect on us, yea, and would drive us utterly to despair, if some view of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus were not vouchsafed to us at the same time. This then is the first principle avowed in the passage before us, "That there is no man that liveth and doth good, and sinneth not[e]."]

2. That all, as sinners, are obnoxious to God's heavy displeasure—

[To man in Paradise it was said, "In the day that thou eatest of the forbidden tree thou shalt surely die." From that time to this "the wages of sin have been death." The whole Gospel assumes this as an acknowledged truth: for, if all were not under the displeasure of God, all did not need a Saviour, nor was Christ a propitiation for their sins. But if all are sinners, then are all under a sentence of death: since it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them;" and again, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Paul, when ignorant of God's law, thought himself alive: but, when instructed in it, perceived himself to be dead, even as others[f].]

3. That all must look for some other way of justification than by any works of their own—

[Justification necessarily implies, that a person is not considered as guilty in the sight of God. But all being guilty, they are condemned as sinners; and consequently cannot at the same time be justified as righteous. But there is a righteousness provided for sinners, in, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is on that very account called, "The Lord our righteousness." In him the vilest of the human race "may be justified, and may glory[g]." But in any other way not even the Apostles themselves could be justified[h] ——— Every man therefore that would find acceptance with God in the last day, must seek "to be found in Christ,

[b] 1 John i. 8, 10. [c] Job xv. 14—16. & xxv. 4—6.
[d] Job iv. 12—19. [e] Eccl. vii. 20. [f] Rom. vii. 9.
[g] Isai. xlv. 25. [h] Gal. ii. 16.

Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ[i]."]

But whilst we view the text as establishing the fundamental principles of the Gospel, let us view it also,

II. As exhibiting a pattern for our imitation—

Who amongst us does not need to deprecate the severity of God's justice, precisely as David does? Let us examine,

1. The general tenor of our past lives—

[From our youth up, what have we been, and what have we done? Has it been the one object of our lives to answer the great end of our creation? ——— Have we duly estimated and sought the blessings of Redemption? ——— Have we under the influences of the Holy Spirit laboured continually to fulfil the will of God, and attain his image, and possess his glory? ——— Have we not rather been so occupied with the things of time and sense, as to live almost, if not altogether, "without God in the world?" ———]

2. Our conduct during the last year—

[We have received innumerable blessings at God's hands; and how have we requited him? ——— We have committed innumerable sins; how have we humbled ourselves for them? ——— We have enjoyed many opportunities for spiritual advancement; how have we improved them? ——— Perhaps we have formed some purposes of amendment: have we carried them into effect to the extent we intended? Has the loss of the years that preceded it made us diligent to improve, as it were, every hour of this? and are we as much fitter for the eternal world as we are nearer to it? ———]

3. The very best work we ever performed—

[Weigh it in the balance, and see if it be not found wanting. Examine *the principle* from which it flowed: was it as purely and entirely from the love of God, and from a sense of gratitude to the Redeemer, as it ought to have been? Look at *the manner* in which it was performed: was there all that humility, that zeal, that dependence on God for his grace and strength, which became you? ——— Mark also *the end* for which it was done: was there a simple desire to serve, and please, and glorify God, without any mixture of self-pleasing, self-seeking, self-glorying? Alas! alas! if only we would try ourselves by the perfect standard of God's law, we should see, that we need One to "bear the iniquity of our holiest things;" and for the best, as

[i] Phil. iii. 9.

as well as for the worst, of our actions to cry out, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified! If David and Job could not answer for the best of their actions, how much less can we[k]?]

ADDRESS,

1. The self-righteous and self-sufficient—

[How unlike are you to David, or indeed to any other of the saints of God! Look at Job[l], Isaiah[m], Paul[n]; Are you better than they? Seek then to possess more of their spirit: for it is "he who humbleth himself, and he only, that shall ever be exalted"———]

2. The broken-hearted and contrite—

[Be not discouraged because you see your vileness; but rather be thankful to God, who has made you sensible of your desert. And do not imagine, that, because you cannot be justified by any thing of your own, you cannot be justified at all: for Christ came into the world for such as you; "He came to seek and to save that which was lost:" and the vilest person in the universe, if with a penitent and contrite heart he believe in Christ, is authorized confidently to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[o]"———]

[k] Job ix. 2, 3. Ps. cxxx. 3, 4.
[l] Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31, 32. & xlii. 6.
[m] Isai. vi. 5. [n] Rom. vii. 18. [o] Isai. xlv. 22, 24.

## CCCCXXXVII.

### PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND MERCY.

Ps. cxlv. 1, 2. *I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee, and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.*

THIS is one of the psalms, the verses of which successively begin with the different letters of the alphabet: and it is one in which (as in the five that follow it) there is nothing but uninterrupted praise and thanksgiving. It is as fine an exhibition of a spiritual frame of mind as any that can be found in all the holy Scriptures: and we suppose, it is on that account that it was appointed by the Church to be read on Whit-Sunday, when the descent of the Holy Spirit, and his influence on the minds of the first Christians, are particularly commemorated. The

subject

subject contained in it has so much of unity, that the whole of it may not unprofitably be brought under our review. In it we observe the disposition of David's mind towards God. He determined to praise God himself, and he wished all others to praise him also. On this he speaks with fixedness of mind, to the same effect as in another psalm, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise[a]." He regards the Messiah as his "King," who justly claims this tribute at his hands: and he determines to pay it "daily," and to the latest hour of his life, yea, and "to all eternity" also in a better world. Every succeeding generation of men he would wish to be occupied in that blessed employment; and gladly would he lead the band, that all creation might join him in one universal chorus.

But we will consider more distinctly the subjects of his praise. Having stated his determination to praise his God, he celebrates,

I. The perfections of his nature—

He mentions,

1. His greatness—

[This he declares to be "unsearchable[b]:" and indeed it is so: for, who can form any idea of his immensity? We speak of his filling all space; but in so speaking we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge." If we look at his "works," he is altogether incomprehensible there also: for, what conception have we of his calling forth into existence this terraqueous globe, together with all the heavenly bodies, and fixing them all in their order by a mere act of his will? Nor are the "wonders" of his providence less worthy of our admiration, seeing that his greatness is no less visible in upholding all things by the word of his power, than it was in the first formation of them. Even the most "terrible of his acts" are also fit subjects for praise, inasmuch as they display the terrors of his Majesty, who gets honour to himself as well in the destruction of his enemies, as in the preservation of his obedient subjects. Doubtless the judgments inflicted on the old world, and those also with which Egypt, and Sodom, and the seven nations of Canaan, were visited, were most awful: but yet, as vindicating the holiness of God, and displaying "the honour of his Majesty,"

[a] Ps. lvii. 7. [b] ver. 3.

jesty," they are worthy to be contemplated with awe, and to be celebrated with the profoundest adoration[c].]

2. His goodness—

[This was a favourite topic with the Psalmist; and therefore in speaking of that he says, "They shall abundantly utter the memory of it." See how every thing in the whole creation bears the stamp of God's goodness! every thing so fitted to its use; every thing so conducive to the good of man, and to the happiness of the whole creation. Consider every thing as originally formed; there is not the minutest thing in the universe that could, even with all the experience of six thousand years, be altered for the better. See with what blessings all the returning seasons are fraught! Let every individual search the records of his life, and what unnumbered instances of God's goodness towards him will he see! Surely, with David, we should "abundantly utter the memory of it," so as to make it the prominent subject of all our meditations, and of all our discourse: and at the same time we should "sing of his righteousness," in that, whilst he has given us innumerable blessings which we never merited, he has never withheld one, which by his promises he had made our due[d].]

3. His mercy—

[In what has hitherto been spoken we are concerned as *creatures:* but in this attribute we are interested as *sinners.* And oh! what reason have we to adore the tender mercy of our God! Who must not say with David, "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?" Yes indeed, "He is good to *all;* and his tender mercies are over all his works[e]." David, it is true, had very abundant cause to sing of *mercy:* but, Who has not? Who that knows any thing of himself, is not penetrated with the deepest sense of God's "grace," in looking upon so vile a sinner; of his "compassion" towards him, when reduced to the most destitute condition; of his "patience," in bearing with such manifold backslidings; and of his "great mercy," in pardoning such innumerable transgressions? If we do not extol our God, and bless his name, yea every day, and all the day long, methinks "the very stones will cry out against us."]

Having thus expatiated on the virtues of his King, David proceeds to bless him for,

II. The administration of his Government—

Here the reference to Christ is more plain and direct. He is the King of Zion; and it is his kingdom

[c] ver. 4—6. [d] ver. 7. [e] ver. 8, 9.

dom that is established over the face of the whole earth. There is not any thing in the whole creation that is not benefited by his reign; but most of all his believing people. Hence David says, "All thy works, whether intentionally or not, shall praise thee," (as any thing of curious workmanship praises the maker of it) "but thy saints shall bless thee," having their whole souls turned to the delightful work[f].

1. It is a glorious kingdom—

[It is extended over heaven, earth, and hell. In heaven there are myriads who are the subjects of it, and who are ascribing all possible honour and glory to their Almighty King. On earth, his power is seen in every nation under heaven. The most potent monarchs bow down to him with the deepest reverence; whilst the most degraded savages are enriched with all the blessings of his kingdom. In hell, the principalities and powers, with Beelzebub at their head, confess his power, and are, however reluctantly, obedient to his commands. His moral commands indeed they do not fulfil; but his positive injunctions they are unable to resist: they are constrained to yield up to him the spoil which they had once seized for themselves, and to flee even from the face of a poor helpless sinner, when once he sets himself, in dependence on Divine aid, to resist their tyrannic sway.

In this kingdom, every subject is himself a king; a king in this world; and entitled to a crown, a throne, a kingdom, in the world to come. Well then might David say of these subjects, "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom[g]."]

2. It is also an everlasting kingdom—

[Other kingdoms have perished, and shall perish: but this shall endure for ever[h]. Though it is as "a stone cut out without hands," and neither founded nor supported by human power, it "shall break in pieces all other kingdoms, and shall stand for ever and ever." "The gates of hell (with all their policy and power,) shall never prevail against it;" no, nor against the meanest subject in it. Nay, when "the earth, and all that is therein, shall be burnt up and utterly dissolved," this kingdom shall continue in its utmost vigour; nor shall its prosperity languish as long as God himself shall endure.

What a theme for praise is here! O reflect upon it, all ye who

[f] ver. 10. [g] ver. 11, 12. [h] ver. 13.

who believe in Jesus; and sing of it, all ye, who have sworn allegiance to his name.]

The Psalmist proceeds yet further to notice,

III. The operations of his grace—

Here the influences of the Holy Spirit come more immediately to our view. It is he who carries on the whole work of grace in the hearts of men, and fits them for the enjoyment of that kingdom that is prepared for them. Behold his operations;

1. How gracious!

[There is not a saint on earth whom he does not aid, according as his situation and circumstances require. "Are any fallen? he upholds them; and raiseth up all that are bowed down," whether with sin or sorrow. "The eyes of all are directed to him" as the only source of spiritual nourishment and strength; and "he gives them such a portion as they need, in the very season" that they need it. Yes; as in the kingdom of nature, God, as the father of all, "opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing," so, in the kingdom of his grace, he administers to every saint whatever is necessary for his consolation and support[i]——— He will indeed "be inquired after for these things;" but He will "suffer none to seek his face in vain." He "draws nigh unto all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth:" or, if they be not able to express their wants in words," "he will fulfil their very desires;" yea, if only, as on any sudden emergency, they "cry unto him, he will hear their cry, and will save them." How astonishingly kind and gracious are these declarations; and how suited to encourage his weak and drooping saints! It frequently happens that they can do little else than sigh and groan: yet even these expressions of their minds he will favourably receive, and richly recompense into their souls[k]———].

2. How righteous!

[Though God, as a sovereign, dispenses his gifts according to the good pleasure of his will, yet there is an equity in all his proceedings, whether of providence or grace: "gracious is the Lord, and righteous:" "he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works[l]." We, from our pride and ignorance, are ready to accuse him of injustice, if he distinguish any as monuments of his grace. But though "he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and has compassion on whom he will have compassion," yet is there, in truth, no inequality in his ways: "our ways are unequal; but his are equal:" he invariably "rewards those who diligently seek him," and "becomes the enemy of those only who rebel,

[i] ver. 14—16. [k] ver. 18, 19. [l] ver. 17.

rebel, and vex his Holy Spirit:" "he filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich only doth he send empty away." He puts, as it becomes him, "a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not." "They who love him shall be preserved," though the whole universe were combined to destroy them: but "all the wicked," whether old or young, rich or poor, "shall be destroyed:" "though hand join in hand, not one of them shall pass unpunished[m]."

Say now, Whether, in this view of the Deity, David's purposes and desires were not highly commendable; "My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord; and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever[n]?"]

From the perusal of this psalm, two REFLECTIONS naturally arise:

1. What an elevation of character does true religion produce!

[We would not speak in a degrading manner of any, and much less of those who are renowned for wisdom: yet who does not see how low and grovelling are the thoughts of statesmen and philosophers, in comparison of those which occupy the Believer's mind? He soars, as it were, on angels' wings: he contemplates the subjects "which angels desire to look into:" "his conversation is in heaven." Brethren, let us not forget for what high destinies we are formed. The brute creation have their faces towards the earth, and have no conception of any thing but what belongs to earth: but man is made erect, with his face, as it were, toward heaven, whither he should always direct his views, and from whence he should expect all his happiness. Let us then think and speak as those who are partakers of a higher nature: and whilst the wise of this world content themselves with the subjects that relate to time and sense, let *us* explore the blessings of Redemption, the mysteries of Grace, and the glories of eternity.]

2. What loss do they sustain who live far off from God!

[It is the diligent and watchful Christian alone that feels the devout affections exercised in this psalm. Too many of those who profess religion are content with a low state of mind. They look upon the work of praise and adoration as rather to be desired than attained; as that which will engage them in heaven, rather than as that which they can be much occupied with on earth. The most of their devotions consist of formal lamentations on account of the deadness of their souls, and lukewarm petitions for pardon and acceptance. Ah! what enemies are these to their own welfare! They might enjoy a very heaven below; and yet

[m] ver. 20. [n] ver. 21.

yet scarcely exceed in happiness the people from whom they have come forth. Oh, Brethren, let it not be thus with you: aspire after high and heavenly things: be not satisfied without the brightest manifestations of God's love, and the richest communications of his grace: "Delight yourselves in God; and then he will give you the desire of your heart."]

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## CCCCXXXVIII.

### GOD'S READINESS TO ANSWER PRAYER.

Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.*

ONE of the most endearing qualities of a monarch is, a readiness to listen to the petitions of his subjects, and to relieve, to the utmost of his power, their necessities. But no earthly potentate can be accessible to all; nor, if he were, could he supply their wants. God alone is competent to this great task. With him there is no weariness, nor any defect either of inclination or of power. To him all may go, at all times, and under all circumstances: and, if they go to him, they shall find, by sweet experience, that "he is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think." Hence the name given to Jehovah by the Psalmist, is this, "O thou that hearest prayer." In the passage before us we are particularly led to contemplate God in this view. It is here said,

I. That he will hear the supplications of his praying people—

"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him."—

[Never will he turn a deaf ear to a humble suppliant. We read not of so much as one whom the Lord Jesus turned away in the days of his flesh, provided only that he came under a deep sense of his own necessities, and a humble expectation of relief from him. So at this time there is no difference with respect to persons; God is ready to hear "all" without exception, whether those who have long approved themselves to him

as

as faithful servants, or those who come to him for the first time in their whole lives———"He will be nigh unto them," the very instant they call upon him. But who can declare all that is contained in this expression? As to his actual presence, God is nigh unto all, whether they call upon him or not. It is of the manifestations of his presence that the Psalmist speaks: and those will God vouchsafe to the souls of his faithful worshippers in a variety of ways. He will "lift up the light of his countenance upon them:" he will shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Ghost: he will give them the spirit of adoption, yea, and the witness of his Spirit, whereby they shall know that their prayers are both heard and answered. We do not now speak of such testimonies as were vouchsafed to Daniel, or Cornelius, but such as are promised in the prophecies of Isaiah to the Church at large: "Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shalt say, Here I am[a]." To judge of these assurances of our acceptance, we must have experienced them in our own souls. To those who have not known them, they must of necessity appear little better than the dreams of an heated imagination. But whatever the ignorant may say, "if we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us[b]," and "will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world[c]."]

It is here however supposed, that we call upon him "in truth"—

[Prayer must be sincere, in order to find acceptance with God. We cannot hope that it shall prevail, if it proceed "from feigned lips." Of what value in the sight of God can a mere formal recital of words be? "It is in vain that we draw nigh to him with our lips, if our hearts be far from him." Or, supposing that we be earnest in our petitions, how can we hope that God will hear them, if we are hypocritically indulging any secret sins? David justly says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." By the prophet Isaiah, God speaks yet more strongly: "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood[d]." "God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth[e]:" and to those who so worship him, is his promise of acceptance confined: "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart[f]."]

To this general promise of hearing his people's prayers, is added an assurance,

II. That

[a] Isai. lviii. 9. [b] Jam. iv. 8. [c] John xiv. 21, 22.
[d] Isai. i. 15. & Prov. xxi. 27. [e] John iv. 24.
[f] Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

II. That he will hear them even under circumstances that may be supposed most unfavourable to their acceptance with him—

Where there have been much previous meditation, and subsequent fluency of expression, we are inclined to hope, that our prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts: but where these have been wanting, we are ready to doubt whether God will regard us at all.

But we are assured in our text that he will hear,

1. Our cries unpremeditated—

[There are many occasions that arise so suddenly as to preclude a possibility of previous meditation. Such was the danger to which Jehosaphat was exposed in the very heat of battle, when the Syrians mistook him for king Ahab, whom they were especially commanded to search out and to destroy: they had actually compassed him round about; and Jehosaphat had only time to cry out to God: yet behold, so instantaneously did God hear and answer, that in a moment "he was helped, and his enemies were moved to depart from him[g]." Thus by ten thousand accidents may we be brought in danger of our lives, or by the devices of Satan be exposed to temptations that threaten to overwhelm and destroy our souls: but prayer will in an instant bring omnipotence to our aid. Look at Peter sinking in the waves: he cries, "Save, Lord; or I perish!" and, behold, the Saviour instantly stretched out his hand, and saved him: and so will that Almighty Friend do to us also, whatever our difficulties or dangers be, according to that blessed promise; "*It shall come to pass, that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*[h]."]

2. Our desires unexpressed—

[It is but little that any man knows of his own necessities: and even those who know most of them, are often greatly at a loss to express their wants in prayer. There are times when the best of men feel their spirit straitened, and can utter their desires only in sighs and groans. This, I say, is the case with those whose knowledge is most enlarged, and whose abilities are most eminent. How then must it be with those whose intellectual powers are small, and who have never enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education? Will God confine his answer to their immediate requests? No. He knows the language of a sigh or groan, as well as if it were expressed in the most fluent language. He knows that at the very time that his people can say little else, than, "Lord, help me; God be merciful to me a sinner,"

[g] 2 Chron. xviii. 30, 31. [h] Ps. lxv. 24.

sinner," they would, if they could, expatiate upon all their wants, and pour out their souls before him in the most enlarged petitions. Hence, in his answers, he regards, not so much their words, as their wants; and enlarges the measure of his gifts in proportion to the largeness of their desires. Whatever can tend to the peace of their minds or the perfection of their souls, *that* he imparts in rich abundance, communicating infinitely "more than they can ask or think[i]."]

But, as in the former case it was supposed that the person calling upon him was sincere, so here it is supposed that the person, whose unpremeditated cries he hears, and whose unexpressed desires he fulfils, does really "fear him;" for it is that principle alone that can render their desires proper to be fulfilled, or their cries to be answered. Where the fear of God really is, there God's will, and God's glory, will alone be desired[j]; and where they are the objects of our desire, however "wide our mouth be opened, God will fill it[k]."]

SEE from hence—

1. How wonderful is the condescension of God to his believing people!

[What would a person, who feels his own incapacity to spread his wants before God, wish for? If God should say to him, Tell me what I shall say for your encouragement, what could the drooping sinner dictate more consoling to himself than what is spoken in our text? ——— Examine well in this view what God has spoken in another place; how strongly he depicts the hopeless state of the suppliant, and what effectual aid he promises to impart[l]——— and you will be prepared to estimate aright the promise in our text. Let none then give way to unbelieving fears, or be dejected because they find not in themselves all the liberty and fluency they could wish: but let the habitual desire of the soul be after God, and the bent of it be towards him on every emergency: then shall not one jot or tittle of this word fail of its full accomplishment[m].]

2. What bitter self-reproach will they feel, who live and die without prayer!

[One of the most bitter ingredients in that cup of God's wrath which will be put into the hands of those who perish, will be the reflection, that they might have had all the glory of heaven, if only they would have sought it in earnest prayer. When they once experience the torments of hell, they may cry ever so long for a drop of water to cool their tongue, but they will not be able to obtain it. How will they then curse their folly, that they neglected to cry, when they might have obtained all that they could possibly desire! The recollection of that word,

[i] Prov. [illegible] & Eph. iii. 20. [j] Prov. xi. 23.
[k] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [l] Isai. xli. 17, 18. [m] Ps. xxxiv. 18.

word, "Ask, and ye shall have," will be a dagger to their souls. Dear Brethren, do but think of this in time. Think on what easy terms, if we may so speak, heaven may be now obtained. If only you truly "fear God," and "call upon him in truth," you may be perfectly assured that you shall never be cast out. If God, unsolicited, gave you his only-begotten Son to die for you, what will he refuse you when you call upon him? He may delay indeed for a time to answer you; but not beyond the fittest time. "Continue instant in prayer" then, yea, "pray and faint not;" for God cannot resist the importunity of prayer. The unjust judge complied with the widow's request at last: and "will not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily."]

## CCCCXXXIX.

### TEMPORAL MERCIES A GROUND OF PRAISE.*

Ps. cxlvii. 12—14. *Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: for he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of wheat.*

THE common habit of mankind is, to rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. But we should make the gifts of God a ladder, as it were, whereby to ascend to him; and take occasion from every blessing he communicates to magnify and adore that bounty from which it proceeds. Nor should we be so engrossed with our *personal* mercies, as to overlook those which are *national*. The pious Jews thought they could never sufficiently praise their God for his mercies vouchsafed to Israel. The theme that beyond all delighted them was, to recount the wonders of love and mercy which their nation had experienced from their first coming out of Egypt even to the day wherein they lived. Who was the author of this psalm we do not know: but it seems evidently to have been written after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, and most probably in the times of Nehemiah, who rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, and dedicated it to God with sacrifices and songs of praise[a]. Certainly God's interpositions for that

[a] Neh. xii. 27, 43.

* Thanksgiving Sermon for Peace.

that people exceeded all that ever he did for any other nation: but next to Israel, methinks, we of *this* Country may adopt the language at the close of this psalm, "He hath not dealt so with any nation[b]." Let us consider,

I. The grounds here stated for praise to God—

We forbear to enter on the Jewish history for the elucidation of our text; intending rather to confine ourselves to the mercies which we are at this time called to commemorate.

Behold then what the Lord hath done for us! Behold,

1. The protection he hath afforded us *from without*—

[Not a country in Europe, except our own, but has suffered from the ravages of war: yet we, with our vast extent of coast, assailable from every port in Europe, and with every Power in Europe at one time leagued against us, have been preserved from invasion; notwithstanding we were, far beyond any other nation, the objects of envy and hatred to our most powerful Foe; and notwithstanding the immense preparations that were made by him for our destruction. But God has truly "strengthened the bars of our gates," so that they could not be forced; or rather "he himself has been a wall of fire round about us," so that not even any serious attempt has been made to invade our land. Other nations far less accessible than ours have been made scenes of most dreadful devastation[c]; but with respect to us, such a restraint has been imposed on our enemies, that they could never carry into execution their cruel projects[cc].]

2. The blessings with which he has loaded us "*within*"—

[He hath blessed us with *increase*, so that, notwithstanding the ravages of war, our population has greatly increased. With *union of sentiment* he hath blessed us to an extent almost unprecedented in our history. The whole nation have been fully convinced, that the war was both just and necessary, and that it was carried on not for the gratifying of ambition, but for security and independence. With *a patient endurance of all the burthens* occasioned by the war, all ranks and orders amongst us have also been greatly blessed. It could never have been conceived that such contributions could have been raised without exciting the most grievous complaints: but they have been paid with liberality and cheerfulness from one end of the land even to the other. With *a respect for religion* also we have been blessed beyond any former

[c] Russia. [cc] Ps. cxxiv. 1—8.

former period of our existence as a nation. The Societies that have sprung up, in the very midst of war, for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures throughout the world, for the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles to the faith of Christ, for the instruction of the rising generation, and for the promotion of piety in every possible way, have far exceeded all that had arisen during whole centuries before. Truly these things abundantly shew how greatly God has blessed us; insomuch that we may say, like Israel of old, "He hath not dealt so with any nation[d]."]

3. The restoration of peace in our borders—

[With only two short intervals, the war has continued five and twenty years: and now at last we are favoured with a peace, which, we hope and trust, will be of long continuance. It is not such a peace as has been often made, a peace no better than an armed truce; but one which our enemy will scarcely venture to violate, seeing that all Europe is leagued together for its preservation. To say that it is a favourable peace, is to disparage it altogether: for it infinitely surpasses all that our most sanguine or ambitious statesmen of former days ever ventured to desire. It has left us too in a state of elevation, prosperity, and power, which our country never before attained. And we have the happiness to say, it is universal, in India, no less than in America and Europe. Now is the happy time come, when we may "beat our swords into plough-shares, and our spears into pruning-hooks," and "sit every one of us under our own vine and fig-tree, none making us afraid[e]."]

4. The abundant provision he has made for our wants—

[When an extraordinary plenty was predicted by the prophet Elisha in Samaria, the answer given him by the chief Courtier was, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be[f]?" or, in other words, "The thing is impossible." In the same strain would any one have replied, if the existing state of things had been predicted as to be accomplished amongst us. But behold, we are, contrary to all reasonable expectation, so "*filled* with the finest of the wheat," that the very cheapness of it creates a general embarrassment: and this singular phenomenon exists, that the only subject of complaint heard in the nation at this time is, that God has been too good to us, and has overwhelmed us, as it were, with his super-abundant kindness and bounty. The promise made to Israel has been almost literally fulfilled to us: he has given us such abundance, that "we have scarcely room to receive it[g]."]

Such being the circumstances of *our* Country at this day, let us consider,

II. Our

[d] ver. 20. [e] Mic. iv. 3, 4. [f] 1 Kin. vii. 1, 2. [g] Mal. iii. 10.

II. Our duty arising from them—

Every blessing which God bestows, whether on nations or individuals, calls for a suitable tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Such a tribute are we at this time called to pay: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion." In order that we may discharge this debt for so many mercies,

1. Let us view the hand of God in them—

[As "war and pestilence and famine are judgments sent of God," so peace with all other national blessings are the gifts of his gracious providence. "There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it proceeds from God." Especially must he be viewed in all those great mercies which have been vouchsafed to us. Israel of old had not more abundant reason for the acknowledgments made by them, than we ourselves to adopt their strains[h]——We are but too apt to be looking to second causes, and to be giving to the creature the honour that is due to God only. But let us be on our guard against this, lest we turn into a curse every blessing that has been bestowed upon us.]

2. Let us duly appreciate their value—

[It is not easy for us, who have seen so little the calamities of war, to estimate in any measure aright, either the protection we have experienced, or the peace which has terminated all our dangers. But, if we could go over a field of battle where myriads of the dead and dying are strewed upon the ground; if we could traverse whole provinces which have been desolated by fire and sword, where countless multitudes are reduced to the utmost possible distress and misery by their pitiless enemies; if we could see with what rapid strides pestilence and famine are following in the train of war; methinks we should need no exhortation to gratitude for the blessings we now enjoy.

True it is that spiritual blessings are of incalculably greater importance: and if we could say, that we had been protected from the incursions of sin and Satan—that we had been "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus;"—that we had been brought to a state of peace with God and in our own consciences—and that we enjoyed in rich profusion the bread of life—we should then have more abundant cause for praise. But we must not forget that our temporal blessings, especially when compared with the troubles which we might have been at this time enduring, have a most favourable aspect on our spiritual welfare; and that the more spiritual we are, the more disposed we shall be to acknowledge God's kindness towards us, whereinsoever it has been displayed.

We must remember too, that, as members of the great body of the

[h] See Ps. cxxiv. 1—8.

the nation, we are called to bless God for our national mercies. Now *national* mercies are of a *temporal* nature: no nation, *as a nation*, participates *spiritual* blessings, any further than the mere external enjoyment of them: individuals alone have the grace of God in their hearts: and therefore, as members of the national body, we are bound, in whatever capacity we have received God's mercies, in that capacity, as far as possible, gratefully to requite them.]

3. Let us render unto God the tribute they demand—

["Praise" is surely the least that we can render for such accumulated blessings: and this, as is observed in the psalm before us, is "both comely and pleasant[i]." Behold how Moses adored God for the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian hosts[k]! See how David makes every distinct blessing a subject of distinct acknowledgment, and no less than twenty-six times in as many short verses ascribes every thing to the free and everlasting mercy of his God[l]! And as David elsewhere calls on every rank and order of society to discharge that debt to God[m], so in our text both "Jerusalem and Zion," both priests and people, are called upon to praise the Lord: yea, the psalm both begins and ends with this just requirement, "Praise ye the Lord; praise ye the Lord." Let every one amongst us then stir up his soul to this blessed work; and "let all that is within us bless his holy name."

Let us not however rest in acknowledgments, however devout. There is a more substantial way in which we are bound to praise him, that is, in our lives, "by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days." This is the union which God himself prescribes; "Whoso offereth me praise, honoureth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God[n]."]*

[i] ver. 1. [k] Exod. xv.
[l] Ps. cxxxvi. See particularly ver. 1, 2, 3, 26.
[m] Ps. cxxxv. 19—21. & cl. 1—6. [n] Ps. l. 23.

* This was written January 18th, 1816. It is not to be supposed that the same circumstances will ever occur again; and therefore the first intention of the author was to omit them altogether. But he conceives that the statement of them may serve to shew, how any *other existing* circumstances may be, not unprofitably, stated, when the occasion shall call for it.

## CCCCXL.

### THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD.

Ps. cl. 6. *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.*

GREATLY diversified has David's experience been, as depicted in the Book of Psalms. Sometimes we find him bowed down under a sense of sin, and sometimes sunk almost in the depths of despondency: but here we view him elevated as on Mount Tabor, and breathing, as it were, the very atmosphere of heaven. It should seem as if all the concluding psalms had been penned at the close of life, when his soul was altogether ripened for glory. In all the five last psalms he speaks the language of praise. Every one of them begins and ends with Hallelujah, that is, "Praise ye the Lord." In the psalm before us, short as it is, he repeats his exhortation no less than thirteen times. O that he might not repeat it in vain! O that we might "drink into his spirit," and be transported, like him, with love and gratitude, with adoration and thanksgiving!

Be it known, that,

I. God deserves all imaginable praise from his creatures—

[What perfection of the Deity is there, which, if duly contemplated, is not a fit subject for praise? His goodness, his mercy, his loving-kindness, his truth, and faithfulness, call for the loudest praises of all his creatures — — — The same we may say of his justice too: for though to ungodly men it is a formidable attribute, yet to the creation at large it has a bright and favourable aspect, inasmuch as it is adverse to nothing but what is hostile to the interests of the whole intelligent creation — — —

But contemplate God in the person of his Son: think of him as assuming our nature, and expiating our sins by his own blood upon the cross, and as becoming the living Head of all his believing people, and, finally, as engaged to "perfect that which concerneth them," and to preserve them blameless to his heavenly kingdom: think of him, I say, in all that he has done and suffered for a ruined world, and in all that he has engaged to do for those who trust in him, and then say, whether the tongues of men and angels be sufficient to declare his goodness, or whether

ther eternity itself suffice to utter all his praise[a]? Surely it is well and justly said, that "his name is above all blessing and praise[b]."]

Yes,

II. There is not "a thing that breathes," which has not abundant occasion to praise him—

We speak not of irrational beings, (though they do praise him according to their ability;) but of "man, into whose nostrils God originally breathed the breath of life[c]." Of all the children of Adam without exception we say, that they have reason to praise their God. This is true of,

1. Those who are yet in heathen darkness—

[Innumerable are the blessings which they enjoy. The constitution of their bodies and the faculties of their souls are fit subjects for adoration and thanksgiving ——— The various blessings provided for the maintenance and support of man, call also for the most grateful acknowledgments[d] ——— There is no man whose comforts do not far exceed his deserts.]

2. Those who enjoy the light of Revelation—

[Unspeakable are the blessings with which they are favoured. The revelation given to the Jews was dark and shadowy; yet *that* is spoken of as an inestimable benefit conferred upon them[e]: what thanks and praise then should *we* render unto God for the clearer light of his Gospel! Oh, what wonders of love and mercy are there revealed! How plain is the instruction there given to all who desire to have their feet guided into the way of peace! Whoever perishes for lack of knowledge now, must confess, that his desert of condemnation is beyond measure aggravated[f], and that his destruction arises solely from his contempt of proffered mercy.]

3. Those who are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ—

[What thanks can *you* ever render to the Lord for the benefits which he has conferred on *you*? Think of the extent and magnitude of those blessings———Think how entirely you owe them to the sovereign grace of God ——— Think what a difference is hereby put between you and others, not in this world only, but in the world to come; and not for time only, but for eternity ——— Will not the very stones cry out against you, if *you* hold your peace? ——— Methinks, your every thought should be adoration; your every word be praise.]

We

[a] Ps. cvi. 2. [b] Neh. ix. 5. [c] Gen. ii. 7. [d] Acts xiv. 17.
[e] Deut. iv. 8. Neh. ix. 13, 14. [f] John iii. 19.

We shall need no farther inducement to praise our God, if only we reflect, that,

III. The more we abound in this blessed exercise, the more exalted will our happiness be—

[What employment have we for our breath that can be compared with this? Doubtless there is much happiness in social converse: but this is nothing in comparison of that which is enjoyed in converse with our God———The language of *prayer* is delightful to every humble soul; but the language of *praise* is an anticipation and foretaste of heaven itself. In heaven there is no other employment, nor will there be to all eternity[g]———It is not possible for a man to be otherwise than happy whilst he is blessing and praising God. This is not an occupation in which a mind discontented or disconsolate can engage: there must of necessity be peace, and love, and gratitude, and joy; yea, in proportion as the praise is ardent, there must be, as the foundation of it, an admiring, an adoring, an overwhelming sense of the Divine goodness.]

APPLICATION—

[Let not any of you say, This employment is not for me: for it is the duty of "every thing that hath breath." There is no creature in the universe so afflicted, but he has encouragement to pray, and scope for praise———Some have an idea, that nothing but sighing and mourning are suited to their condition; and that the voice of praise and thanksgiving is for those only who have attained a fuller assurance of their acceptance with God. But they might as well say, that gratitude was not their duty; as, that they were not called upon to express their gratitude in the language of praise. Know, Brethren, that "whosoever offereth God praise, glorifieth him:" and, his desire is, that every mourning soul should "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness." I would not discourage humiliation; for I well know that it should ever be an associate of our sublimest joys: but this I would say to all; That Christ came to "give unto them the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" and that, in the experience of this, they shall approve themselves "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in whom he will be glorified." To every creature then without exception, whether high or low, rich or poor, old or young, I would say with David in a foregoing psalm, "Praise the name of the Lord[h];" yea, begin and close your every service with "Hallelujah, Hallelujah."]

[g] Rev. v. 13. [h] Ps. cxlviii. 11—13.

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